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CONTRIBUTORS

RICHARD WOLLHEIM, who taught philosophy at Columbia last fall as an exchange professor from the University of London, is the author of a study of F. H. Bradley, just published by Penguin.

MAX HAYWARD is the translator of **Doctor Zhivago** and is a Research Fellow at St. Anthony's College, Oxford.

HAROLD ROSENBERG, whose book, **The Tradition of the New,** was recently published, has just completed a study of Arshile Gorki to be brought out this year by George Braziller. Beginning with this issue Mr. Rosenberg will be Art Consultant for PR.

JAMES MERRILL's latest collection of poetry, **The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace,** was published last year by Knopf. His play, **The Bait,** will appear in a collection, **Artist's Theater,** edited by Herbert Machiz.

KENNETH KOCH teaches English at Columbia. Grove Press has just put out his long poem, **Ko, Or a Season on Earth.**

GEORGE LICHTHEIM is at work on a study of Karl Marx.

FRANK KERMODE, who teaches at the University of Manchester, is the author of **Romantic Image,** a volume of literary criticism.

HOWARD NEMEROV is in the English Department at Bennington College.

DAVID FITELSON teaches at Emory College.

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Alberto Moravia

THE WOMAN FROM MEXICO*

It was a warm, rainy day, and the moment he was out of the house Sergio was aware of his mistake. He had put on a heavy winter suit, whereas, in this almost tropical weather, he ought to have been wearing a light spring suit. Moreover, he had also burdened himself with a winter overcoat, a double-breasted one, which meant that he had not one, but the equivalent of two, overcoats on his chest and belly. In addition he was wearing a woolen vest under his shirt, next to his skin, woolen socks on his feet and a woolen scarf round his neck. He had hand he held his umbrella, in the other his gloves. He had moved only a few steps when he began to feel he was accoutred like a medieval knight. It was the fault, he realized, of those detestable black clouds that formed a confused mass in the sky; and also of his mother, who had come while he was dressing to implore him, for goodness' sake, to wrap himself up well. For a moment he thought of going back and reducing his burden of clothes, but he at once gave up the idea: he lived on the top floor, the lift was not working, and climbing up the stairs with all those clothes on him would be too disagreeable an effort. Nevertheless, the further he walked along the crowded streets, the more did the discomfort and heat and weight of his clothes

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increase, and with them his ill-humor. It was raining, into the bargain—a fine rain, not enough to justify the use of an umbrella but enough to cover the pavements with a dewlike moisture slippery to the feet. This rain seemed to make the air even more stifling; when he reached the top of the street he became conscious that he was dripping with sweat.

He had come out in order to go for a walk, but he saw that, with all this mass of clothes on him, his walk was not producing its usual diverting, restful effect; on the contrary, with the unhealthy heat in which he was imprisoned from head to foot, his eye concentrated angrily upon all the meanest and ugliest aspects of the city. As though seeing them for the first time, he became alive to the vulgarity of the shop windows filled with objects which all seemed to him quite useless; to the damp, murky wretchedness of narrow lanes strewn with rubbish and frequented by shadowy, prowling cats; to the awkwardness of the women's clothes; to the poorness of the men's clothes; and to the sweaty, greasy, worn-out look of the faces that came ceaselessly towards him out of the dimness of the street, rushed forward to meet him and then disappeared. The whole city, which usually he loved so much, now appeared to him like an enormous heap of dirt in which, thrown confusedly together, men and things that in another place and in different conditions would have kept their freshness and integrity became corrupted and rotten.

Meanwhile, darkness was rapidly falling. Not knowing what to do, he stopped in front of the window of a tobacconist's shop, observing, almost without seeing them, the pipes and the packs of cards displayed there. The thing that troubled him most, at that moment, was his woolen socks: he tried to move his toes inside his shoe and felt them all stuck together, as though they were on the point of melting, like candles. Then someone coming out of the shop knocked against him; he looked

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up and recognized Luciano, who at one time had been a friend of his.

He had never been very fond of Luciano, who had been one of his old school companions; and during the last ten years he had seen him perhaps once or twice a year. But, though he did not like him, and in fact had no desire to see him, he had never succeeded in breaking off this absurd and desultory relationship. In reality he perceived in Luciano the personification of a part of himself which he hated and which he would willingly have got rid of if he had been able to. In person, they were very much alike: both of them small and dark, with fine features, both of them careful in their dress. But Luciano's face bore the signs of vulgar dissipation, whereas Sergio's had a gentle, rather melancholy expression. Luciano was pale, almost grey in the face, with a bald forehead that stretched back beneath thin hair, and dull, lifeless eyes. Sergio had a fresh face, thick, glossy hair, and a lively look in his eye. They were both, as they say, of good family. But while Sergio lived with his parents and worked as a lawyer in the office of his father, also a lawyer, Luciano had left home and lived in furnished rooms; he did no work, but spent his time with people he picked up all over the place—variety actresses, professional gamblers, idle young men. This world was quite as distasteful to Sergio as was his old school friend in person. But, by some kind of incomprehensible fascination, both Luciano's world and Luciano himself, though repugnant to him, also attracted him, and he was never able to cold-shoulder his friend when, at rare intervals, he fell in with him. On these occasions they would remain in each other's company for an evening, or a night, for dinner or in some other place. Next day Sergio would feel humiliated at the memory of the evening spent with his despicable friend and would swear to himself that he would never allow such a thing to happen again.

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On seeing Luciano, Sergio's first instinct was to avoid him. But his friend had already seen him, and came up to him. They shook hands and walked off together down the street. Luciano had been buying cigarettes, and he offered one to Sergio. The latter would have liked to refuse, but he accepted. "How are you?" asked Luciano after a moment.

"I'm all right," said Sergio tartly.

"Everyone well at home?"

"Yes, everyone."

"And you're still working in your lawyer's office?"

"Yes, still there."

His friend appeared to be in a bad humor; and Sergio suspected that he had noticed his first instinctive movement to avoid him. He wanted to be polite and thought of asking, in turn, for news of someone closely connected with him. But, since he did not know his family, he could think of nothing better than inquiring after Luciano's mistress—that is to say, after his last mistress, with whom he had seen him about six months before. She had been, as far as he could remember, a quite young woman and by no means ugly, though, like all Luciano's women, extremely common. But, apart from this confused impression of youth, attractiveness and vulgarity, he could not manage to remember at all what she was like nor who she was. Even the name Albina, which he dug up out of the back of his mind, seemed to him uncertain. Nevertheless he asked: "And how is Albina?"

Luciano stopped to relight his cigarette which had gone out. By the gleam from the little flame of his lighter, Sergio observed that his question had produced an effect which was obvious but not easy to define. Luciano's coolness was too ostentatious to be genuine. "Ah, Albina—you remember her, do you?" he said in a sarcastic tone. "Perhaps it'll please you to hear that this very day we've parted for good and all."

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"Why *please* me?" asked Sergio in surprise.

The other man went on: "Albina is a . . .," and here he uttered an ugly word that startled Sergio, who could not bear such language, especially in relation to women. "I was completely fed up with her . . . and so I told her to get out. That pleases you, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't please me in the least," said Sergio, embarrassed; "on the contrary, I'm sorry . . ."

Luciano stopped and looked him up and down with a sardonic expression. "You're a nice kind of person," he said. "So you're sorry, are you? Say it again, won't you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"You're shameless, into the bargain."

"But I . . ."

"You like Albina—quite a lot, don't you? And now you're pleased that she isn't living with me any longer . . ." Luciano paused for a moment, relishing, apparently, the bitterness contained in these words. Then he added contemptuously: "A fine sort of friend, certainly . . . but of course all friends are the same. They all aim at making a cuckold of you."

Sergio was astonished. He did not remember ever having paid any particular attention to Albina on the two or three occasions on which he had seen her in Luciano's company; nor did he remember observing that Albina had taken any interest in him. Somewhat nervously he said: "But I assure you that I . . ."

His friend interrupted him. "D'you really think I didn't notice you that day when we went to the races and then had dinner together? I'm not blind, you know . . . Anyhow, it's human . . ."

"But that day—really . . ."

"Now," said Luciano, stopping in front of a small entrance-door in a side street, "this is where Albina lives. I had to come

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here to give her back these gloves . . . but it would be much better if you would go and do so. Go on then—go and give her the gloves," and he thrust a pair of crumpled gloves into his hand. "Go on; and tell her that as far as I am concerned it's all over. And of course the succession is open, the coast is clear. Go on, and make the most of it. She'll be very pleased . . . it's just what she wants."

"But, my dear chap, I . . ."

"What are you waiting for? Get along, go on!" Luciano gave him an ill-mannered push which forced him into the doorway. "Go on . . . You'll be delighted, you know you will. And I've spared you the trouble of finding out the address, I've brought you right to the door . . . Or d'you want me to come and undress her for you, eh?"

"But Luciano . . ."

The other man was paying no further attention, by this time, to anything he said. "Well, that's agreed, then. Be nice to her, ask her out to dinner, don't be stingy . . . Good luck to you." He saluted him with a wave of the hand and disappeared.

Now that he was alone again, Sergio felt more sweat-drenched than ever. To the heat there was now added the disagreeable sensation of a false position. What was happening to him seemed to be a thing of the highest improbability; yet it was not its improbability that troubled him, so much as Luciano's attitude and his own. The improbability might be explained in this way: either Luciano was jealous of him without any reason, or Albina had made use of him to make her lover jealous. But what gave him food for thought was, on the one hand, the quiet contempt of his friend, as though it were obvious that he was aiming to supplant him in Albina's favors; and, on the other, his own sudden inclination to accept this role of traitor that was being fastened upon him. Sergio had

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a dignified, if somewhat rigid, idea of himself. And now the temptation which Luciano's mistake aroused in his mind made him doubtful of himself. "It's quite clear," he thought; "all I need to do is to give up the idea of going up to Albina's flat and go home, and then Luciano will be convinced that he was wrong." But he noticed that—in spite of himself, so to speak—he had in the meantime advanced a step or two along the passage into the house. It was an old, dirty house, the passage was dark, and a damp, musty smell filled the air; and yet, inexplicably, the decrepitude, the dirtiness, the smell, the gloom attracted and excited him. His heart had started to beat faster and his breath almost failed him. "I'll hand over the gloves to her and then I'll go," he said to himself finally, as he walked on towards the end of the passage.

He ran up three flights of stairs, his mind in a state of combined oppression and eagerness, and, in a dim, uncertain light, rang the bell at a small door that appeared to be coated with pitch. It was opened by a bony woman with untidy hair, wearing an apron, with a baby on her arm and a charcoal-fan in her hand. At the mention of Albina she pointed with the fan, without saying a word, to a door at the end of a passage. Sergio, his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other and feeling more ill at ease than ever, crossed a small, bare hall, went to the end of the passage and knocked at the door.

A woman's voice called to him to come in. He pushed open the door and found himself in a narrow little room which appeared to be a mere prolongation of the passage. In a row, on one side, were a small wardrobe, a sofa covered with worn red material, and a little table and chair; on the other side there was just enough room left for a person to move. At the far end, in front of the closed window, stood an old dressing-table with faded draperies and dirty ribbons; and at the dressing-table sat Albina. Her rounded hips, firm and youthful,

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bulged out from the little stool on which she was perched; she was in a greenish undergarment, and was finishing the brushing of her hair, her head held to one side and her bare arm raised as she wielded the hairbrush. She said in a quiet voice: "Is that you, Luciano?"

Sergio said to himself: "I'll give her the gloves and then go away." Then he answered, embarrassed: "No, its Sergio."

Albina turned round abruptly, with an almost convulsive movement of her whole body, the whites of her eyes showing and her swelling brown bosom tightly stretched beneath the lace trimmings of her chemise. Sergio walked towards her. "Perhaps you don't remember me," he began, seeking to adopt a polite, detached tone, "and you will be surprised to see me dropping in here in place of Luciano . . . I'm sorry, but I am the bearer of bad news. Luciano, a few minutes ago, requested me to tell you that he is not coming and that he does not intend seeing you again . . . and he asked me to give you these gloves." He leant forward and put the gloves on the dressing-table.

It was to be expected that she would make some sort of comment on Luciano's behavior. But Albina remained silent, gazing at him with curiosity. He, too, looked at her and noted, almost with regret, that she was indeed a very pretty girl and that he was attracted by her: her small head, with its round, black eyes, its aquiline nose and fine mouth, had the grace of a bird's head; but her neck was thick, her shoulders ample and her bosom opulent, with a warm, brown color of skin. Albina, with her faded old green undergarment and her unshaven armpits, soft and black and bushy, gave an impression of great slovenliness if not of actual dirtiness. But even this, he realized, was not unattractive to him. Confused, and almost against his will, he added: "If you like, and if you have nothing better to do, we might have dinner together."

He immediately regretted having given this invitation and

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hoped that she would refuse it. Albina, at last, said slowly: "Luciano is a liar . . . It's I who don't want to have anything more to do with *him* . . . But that's no reason for *you* to crow over anybody. D'you really think I didn't see what was going on?"

So Albina too, as well as Luciano, was convinced that he had been trying to make advances to her. Irritated, he replied: "Whether I think it or not, I simply came to bring you back your gloves."

"And to ask me out to dinner," Albina prompted him. "Well, where shall we go?"

So she *was* accepting his invitation. Sergio could not help feeling pleased. "Wherever you like," he said.

"Let's go to Paolone's," she answered; "the food's good there." She took up the hairbrush again and resumed her energetic toilet. "Why don't you sit down?" she said. "What are you doing, standing there stiff as a poker?"

Sergio sat down awkwardly on the sofa, encumbered by his heavy clothes. The adventure with Albina was now mixed up in his mind with the frantic desire to rid himself of these garments. He thought of the moment when he would undress in that little room, which did not appear to be heated in any way, and it seemed to him that undressing would give him even greater pleasure than possessing Albina. But alas, it would be a long time before that blessed moment arrived. "And so you're pleased," said Albina without looking at him, "that Luciano and I have parted."

"Really," stammered Sergio, "really, I . . ."

"You couldn't believe it was true," went on Albina, "but I seem to see the whole thing . . . The moment Luciano told you that everything was over between us, you chuckled with joy and came rushing up here . . . thinking that this was the best possible moment. Isn't that so?"

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"I swear you're mistaken," said Sergio with some energy. But he was no longer so sure. Was it really true that she was mistaken?

"What d'you think, then? That I hadn't noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"Last time we saw each other, with Luciano . . . in that restaurant . . . you never for one moment stopped pressing my foot under the table. You practically ruined one of my shoes. You're a nice sort of chap, you are."

Sergio, at this, remained silent for some little time. Now at last it was a question of a precise fact: he had pressed her foot with amorous intentions. He remembered indeed having gone to a restaurant with Luciano and Albina; he remembered also that Luciano and Albina had sat opposite to him, on a seat against the wall. But he was absolutely sure he had not intentionally pressed Albina's foot. Perhaps, without meaning to, he might have kicked against it under the table. It was more likely—as had already occurred to him—that Albina had invented the whole story in order to make Luciano jealous. Reassured by this examination of the situation, he said slowly: "I'm pretty certain you're making a mistake . . . It's impossible that I could have thought of pressing your foot under the table; it's a thing I would never do in any circumstances . . . Perhaps you're confusing me with someone else."

"Isn't he a darling!" she exclaimed scornfully. "No, I'm not confusing you with anyone. In things like this I never make mistakes."

"She really *is* common," thought Sergio, affronted. But he was conscious that this vulgarity, so thoroughly in tune with the place and the person, was not unattractive to him. He tried to take a frivolous, rakish line. "Oh well, then, since you're so positive about it, let's admit that I pressed your foot under the table . . . What comes next?"

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Albina put down her brush; her hair was now all smoothed out and unravelled and lay in a fan shape over her shoulders. Then she turned towards him: "Come here," she said.

She had used the familiar "tu," and this troubled Sergio. He rose and took a step forward. "I said 'Come here,'" she insisted.

Sergio took another step. "And now," said the woman playfully, in the way one speaks to a dog, "lie down!"

"What ever d'you mean?"

"Lie down!"

Sergio bent his knees inside the heavy folds of his overcoat and knelt down, finding himself face to face with Albina sitting on her stool. She lifted her strong, rounded arm and, placing her hand on the back of his neck, began: "It's not true that I don't like you . . . In fact I certainly *do* like you . . ."

"What am I doing?" thought Sergio. But he brought his face close to Albina's, as if to kiss her. She immediately pushed him away. "No, no . . . Be good, now. I said I liked you, but that's not quite reason enough . . . Oh, he's an artful one, isn't he?" She laughed in a rather awkward way, showing her small, white teeth, and dealt him a blow in the chest, a real peasant woman's blow, strong and hard. Sergio lost his balance and fell back on the floor in a sitting position.

Furious with himself, he struggled to his feet again. He realized that, what with admitting to having pressed Albina's foot and having then tried to kiss her, he had given a decisive acknowledgment that Luciano was right. And without any result, into the bargain. He asked irritably: "Once and for all, do you like me or do you not?"

"You wouldn't let me finish," replied Albina. "Yes, I do like you, but it's no good, I'm not for you . . . I belong to Luciano." She uttered these last words in a tone of challenging, purblind loyalty—just exactly, thought Sergio, like a woman of

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the slums who never discusses her lover even if he betrays or disgraces her. "But Luciano," he could not refrain from saying, "doesn't want to have anything more to do with you."

"That doesn't matter: I belong to Luciano. And, what's more, you're a friend of Luciano's and you ought not to try and get his girl friend away from him . . . It's not at all nice, what you're trying to do."

She shook her head with an air of disapproval and got up from the dressing-table. Standing there in her slippers, she looked too broad in the hips for her height. She went over to a clothes-hanger, took down two stockings that were hanging there and looked at them with a dubious air. The stockings that she had on at present were heavily darned and had highly visible seams that looked like scars. She put back the other stockings on the clothes-hanger and went to the wardrobe. Sergio, still sweating freely, heedlessly went up to her and put his arm round her waist. She took no notice of him, but opened the wardrobe and took from it the only garment it contained, a shabby brown coat. "Help me on with it, will you?"

Sergio took the coat and, when Albina bent back between his arms in order to slip into the sleeves, kissed her on the neck. He noticed that her skin felt greasy and that her hair had a coarse smell. She made a movement as if chasing away a fly. "Ugh, how obstinate you are!" she exclaimed.

She buttoned up the coat, with its exaggeratedly tight waist that made her hips and bosom look as if they were bursting out of it. Then she went into a corner of the room, took off her slippers and, hopping from one foot to the other, put on a pair of decrepit shoes. "Come on, let's go," she said.

Sergio took his umbrella and hat and followed her with an acute sense of boredom and irritation. The bony, dishevelled woman with the baby in her arms appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. "If Signor Luciano comes," said Albina, "ask him to wait in my room."

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They went out and started side by side down the narrow stairs. As they went, their hips touched and Albina said, with a laugh that to Sergio seemed offensive: "Rubbing up against me, eh?"

"Go to the devil," he said to himself. But his arm, as if moved by an independent will, raised itself and encircled Albina's waist. Without saying a word she gave him, almost in the dark as they were, a violent blow with her hip which nearly knocked him down. Sergio understood and let go of her waist.

Outside it was raining, and it was warmer than ever. "Put up your umbrella," Albina said to him. He obeyed, and Albina clung to his arm, with a movement that was almost affectionate. They walked off together.

"What d'you think of Luciano?" she suddenly asked him.

Without reflecting, Sergio answered: "I think he's an idler and that he'll come to a bad end."

She remarked, in a judicious tone of voice: "You're not going about it in at all a good way. I've told you already . . . You won't succeed in making me fall in love with you by speaking ill of Luciano."

Sergio replied irritably: "I think far worse of him than that . . . I only told you the least important part of what I feel."

"And yet you try to pass as his friend."

"But I'm *not* a friend of Luciano's," said Sergio vehemently. "Will you, or won't you, understand? I scarcely know him."

"Well, it may be so. But *he* says you're such great friends."

"We were at school together, that's all . . . I could never be a friend of a type like Luciano."

"Why not?"

All of a sudden Sergio's nostrils curled in anger. "Because Luciano is a person of unreliable character and I am not."

"Well, it may be so," she repeated obstinately. "It may even be, as you say, that Luciano is an unreliable person. But

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he trusts you, and you, on the other hand, are trying to take his girl friend away from him. Those are the facts."

"But what's that got to do with it? Anybody might try and make love to you."

"Yes, but for you it's different . . . You and Luciano are friends."

There was nothing to be done then. Sweat-soaked and furious, Sergio remained silent. "I ought to leave her and drop the whole thing," he thought. But the pressure of Albina's arm, the light contact of her rounded hip, sufficed to make him change his mind. They came to a dark square which was in process of demolition. Violet neon signs cast reflections upon heaps of trampled mud, and here and there red lamps gave warning of the presence of deep holes full of water. "Wait for me here," said Albina; "I'm going into the post office for a moment."

She went into the post office building and Sergio stayed in the doorway. It was still raining, and the light from the lamp-posts showed a thick drizzle that looked almost like a cloud of dust. People were going in and out of the post office, many of them humble, working-class women like Albina. "Surely this is the moment to vanish," he said to himself; and he walked slowly away along the side of a high fence. But as he went he remembered that he had a letter to post, and he turned back again. Just as he was putting his letter into the box he felt someone touch him on the arm. "Come along," said Albina.

She was turning a letter round and round in her hands. Then, without opening it, she put it in her pocket. "Aren't you going to read it?" asked Sergio.

"It's from my husband. All in good time . . ."

"From your husband?"

"Yes," she replied, "I'm married, you know . . . or didn't you know? He's in the Goretti Variety Company . . . poor devil . . . He's traveling, traveling all the time, and he's always

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writing to me. I worked with him for a bit . . . I sang and he accompanied me on the guitar . . . Then I got fed up. We had to go to all sorts of funny places in the provinces . . . and I preferred to stay in Rome." They had come out of the square by this time and were walking along a wide, muddy street, without any pavements, and encumbered by a double row of pedlars' handcarts.

Albina was in no hurry to get to her dinner. One by one, she examined each of the handcarts, even the ones which held second-hand books, even the ones which sold razor-blades. Really and truly, Sergio could not help thinking, she was a typical little vagabond, the kind of person that creeps out at twilight from some miserable lodging to enjoy the spectacle of the streets. But not even the devouring light of the acetylene lamps seemed to impair her characteristic, rather brutal attractiveness; at most, it showed up the pallor of her cheeks and the yellowish halo of fatigue round her black eyes. At a men's outfitter's shop, above which a long band of rain-soaked cloth proclaimed in large letters: "Sensational Fall in Prices," she turned resolutely and went in, saying: "Come on in, I want to buy a tie for Luciano."

Sergio followed her, piqued by this stubborn faithfulness. The shop was small and in a state of great disorder; it looked as though it were not only the prices that had fallen, but also the entire stock of merchandise, all over the counter. The shopkeeper displayed under the eyes of Albina a tangled mass of cheap ties, and Albina carefully selected the ugliest of them all; she then asked Sergio: "That really is a pretty one, isn't it?"

"Very pretty indeed."

"Is it for this gentleman?" asked the shopkeeper. "It's just the right thing for the gentleman." Albina fumbled in her purse in an embarrassed way. "Let me pay for it," said Sergio, urged on by a kind of vindictive punctilio.

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When they were outside again, Albina said to Sergio: "Thank you . . . But don't go and tell Luciano it was you who paid for it."

"What d'you take me for?"

They started looking into the shop windows again. Albina paused for a long time in front of a shoe shop and then said: "As you spoilt a pair of shoes of mine by kicking my foot under the table, you ought to buy me a new pair." Her tone was playful, but not entirely so: Albina, sponger as she was, really hoped to extort a present of a pair of shoes. Sergio hesitated a moment, then decided that he would buy Albina the shoes. Having bought the shoes, he would still have enough money left for the dinner, but not for the customary present after the act of love. He thought, however, that Albina would be content with the shoes. She was looking at him hopefully. He said slowly: "How on earth is it that Luciano, who is so very fond of you, lets you go about in such terrible shoes?"

"I don't want anything out of Luciano."

"I suppose it's *you* who pay for *his* shoes?"

Albina did not choose to answer and Sergio concluded that as he had always suspected, Luciano did not scruple to take money from his mistresses. "Come along then," he said after a moment; "let's go and buy these shoes."

Albina, by this time, had evidently given up hope of the shoes, for she gave a brisk, joyful start of surprise. "Are you talking seriously?"

"Yes, perfectly seriously."

They went into the shop. Albina was beside herself with delight, as could be seen from the way in which she strutted along like a peacock, her hips swaying, past all the mirrors and piles of boxes. She sat down and extended her small, well-formed foot to a fair-haired, talkative assistant. Sergio was surprised to see that, of all the many shoes that the assistant diligently sug-

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gested to her, she ended by choosing a pair of sports shoes, massive, light-colored, and with thick, lemon-yellow crepe rubber soles. "Wouldn't a pair of black town shoes be better?" he hazarded.

"No," replied Albina; "these are better, because they won't spoil when you press my foot under the table." This was a joke in which her gratitude found a way of expressing itself. But Sergio blushed, partly because the assistant looked at him and smiled.

Outside the shop, Albina rushed at him and kissed him impetuously on the cheek, saying: "Thanks, I'm very grateful, you know." Sergio replied discontentedly: "You kissed me on the cheek just as if I'd been your father."

"Luciano's the only person I kiss on the mouth."

In her new shoes that were too bright in color and too heavy, in her brown coat stretched tight over her ample hips, and carrying the old shoes in a parcel under her arm, Albina, filled with joy and pride and poverty, was almost touching; and Sergio, at her reply, comforted himself with the thought that he had at any rate done a good deed.

On leaving the shop where she had bought her new shoes, Albina went straight to a little cubby-hole of a shop near by which specialized in the repair of old shoes. Standing amongst piles of misshapen, dust-covered boots and shoes smelling mustily of damp leather and feet, she explained her requirements, at some length, to the cobbler. Then she bought some polish for her new shoes and went out again.

They walked on through the same dark, sordid quarter, from street to street, from one alley to another. Suddenly Sergio, on looking around, saw on one side the colored glass door of a brothel, on the other side a urinal, and, a little further on, the entrance to a restaurant. Underfoot were the usual muddy, glistening paving-stones, with cabbage-stalks scattered here and

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there and hungry cats prowling. Three men came out of the brothel laughing and talking in loud voices, and made for the urinal. "This is a nice sort of place," Sergio was on the point of remarking. But he had no time to do so, for Albina stopped in front of the restaurant and announced: "Here we are."

On the glass panes of the entrance door, in fact, was painted in a maroon color, in running script: *Paolone. Specialità romane. Vino dei Castelli.* Albina pushed the door open and, followed by Sergio who looked round disgustedly as he closed his umbrella, went into the hot, smoky atmosphere of the restaurant. This consisted of a row of minute little rooms. In the first room, larger than the rest, there was a central table upon which were pyramids of oranges and a few bunches of fennel and a large ice-box of rough wood, surmounted by a lordly pair of horns. It was a restaurant with no pretensions at all, as could be gathered from the frequent call of "half-portion" echoing from one room to another. Sergio noticed that the customers all resembled, in some way, either Albina or Luciano: the women were young, very much made up and badly dressed, the men dissipated-looking, jaded, and showily dressed with dubious elegance. Albina made her way slowly from room to room, constantly greeted by one or another of these unlovely customers; and she appeared to be looking for something or somebody. When she reached the far end of the restaurant, she beckoned to Sergio, as much as to say: "I've found what I wanted."

Sergio went forward in his turn and saw a tiny room, like a cell, containing only two small tables. One of them was free, and Albina had already sat down at it; at the other were sitting Luciano and a woman.

"Ah, so that's what it was," he thought. Luciano did not appear surprised: "Hullo, Sergio," he said in a quiet voice. Sergio went to Albina's table and said in a low voice, stooping forward: "Let's go away . . . I see Luciano's here."

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"A pleasant discovery," she answered. She was pretending to examine the menu, her head lowered.

"Let's go to the Splendid," suggested Sergio, thinking that the idea of an expensive restaurant might induce her to follow him.

She lifted her head and stared at him with feigned astonishment. "Why?" she said. "It's perfectly all right here."

So there was nothing for him to do but sit down. Sergio took off his overcoat and placed it, with his umbrella and hat, on a chair. The two tables were right opposite one another, and it was impossible for the four people occupying them not to look at each other. Albina and he were sitting on a seat with its back to one wall, and, on a seat with its back to the other wall, sat Luciano and his companion. Over the doorway hung a curtain, which increased the feeling of intimacy and seclusion.

Sergio was by this time fully conscious of being nothing but a pawn in the game of Albina's jealousy, and there was no knowing how long it was since this game had begun. And yet, glancing at Albina, he admitted the hope that he himself would play the part, in this game, of the proverbial onlooker who derives more advantage from it than the contestants—in other words, that he would succeed, whatever the reason for that success might be, in gaining possession of Albina. "I'm an idiot," he said scornfully to himself. Although he had taken off his overcoat, he was hotter than ever; the air inside the restaurant, thick with smoke and smells of cooking, was stifling. Once again, in this heat, his adventure with Albina attracted him as a speedy and pleasant means of ridding himself of his woolen socks, of tearing the clothes off his back and remaining naked in the cool air of some squalid rented room. Albina, in the meantime, had called the waiter and was ordering what seemed to Sergio, always very sober in these respects, a Gargantuan dinner—*hors d'oeuvres,* spaghetti, roast lamb with potatoes. As

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for a sweet, she added, she would decide about that later. He could not refrain from admiring this valiant appetite that not even jealousy was able to extinguish. "You're hungry?" he asked, turning towards her.

"Yes, certainly I'm hungry," she answered aggressively.

It was remarkably difficult for the two couples to sit opposite and not look at each other. Sergio, after trying in vain to avoid turning his eyes towards the other two, decided that he might as well take a frank look at them. Luciano was sitting sideways, so that he saw him in profile. But the woman sat directly facing him. She was a woman of singular aspect, and for a moment she aroused Sergio's curiosity. Black-haired, she had a sharp-featured, long face of a coppery yellow color. Her eyes were large, black and unmoving, wide open but unseeing, glittering and inexpressive as a couple of stones. Her long nose, aquiline but broad at the nostrils, her mouth with its scornful expression and corners turned downwards, gave her face an air of virility. She seemed to be tall, with ample shoulders and a very well-formed bosom tightly swathed in the black silk of her low-necked dress. What struck him most in her face was the reddish color of her complexion and the savage, unmoving expression. Beside this woman, Luciano looked fragile and wan, and even Albina appeared femininely slender. He was startled out of these thoughts by a blow in the ribs from Albina's elbow. "D'you know who that woman is?" she said in her normal voice, so that Luciano could hear her. "She's a Mexican who sings at the Teatro Nuovo . . . d'you think she's attractive?"

"No," answered Sergio, lowering his voice.

"She *is* ugly, isn't she? She's a Redskin . . . Sitting down like that she looks tall, but when she gets up—you'll see—she looks as if she'd sunk into the floor . . . as if she'd had a piece taken off her legs."

"Why d'you talk so loud?"

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"*She* can't understand, anyhow," replied Albina, shrugging her shoulders, "she only understands Spanish . . . She calls herself by a man's name—Consuelo."

"It's not a man's name, it's a woman's. It means Consolation."

"Luciano's consoling himself with her because I've chucked him," said Albina maliciously.

Sergio looked again at the couple opposite and noticed that they scarcely spoke to each other. The Mexican woman was eating composedly and Luciano addressed brief remarks to her from time to time, illustrating his meaning with gestures of his hand. But it was a question of simple things: "Would you like something to drink? . . . D'you like that? . . . Some bread?" The waiter brought the *pasta asciutta* and Albina who, notwithstanding her jealousy, had already swallowed a plateful of salame, immediately rolled a huge tangled heap of spaghetti round her fork and raised it to her mouth without ever taking her eyes off the Mexican woman. The latter made Luciano pour out some wine for her and then drank, sending to her companion, over the top of her glass, a signal of sentimental understanding, serious and almost ritual. Luciano, in turn, took the glass from her hand and also drank, placing his lips where she had placed hers. "Just look what a fool the man must be," muttered Albina furiously, her mouth full of spaghetti. She did not, however, fail to empty her plate and, to finish up with, mopped up what was left of the gravy with a hunk of bread. "And then we'll go home," she said loudly, pushing away the empty plate.

Sergio knew quite well that she was talking merely in order to be overheard and possibly did not even know what she was saying. However he could not resist answering: "But you said, before, that you didn't want me."

"I've changed my mind now," said Albina loudly; "besides I always liked you . . . more than Luciano."

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"Don't shout so loud!"

"You're not a scoundrel like him. You're a gentleman—anyone can see that."

Luciano took the Mexican woman's hand, which she permitted him, quite willingly, to hold. He raised her hand to his lips, eyeing her slily as he did so, and then gave it a bite. The Mexican woman smiled, showing her white, sharp, wolf-like teeth. Luciano kissed her hand where he had bitten it. Albina said to Sergio, with unexpected affection: "I bought a tie for you. Now I'm going to put it on for you."

Sergio, faced with this sudden improvization, was flabbergasted. "But . . . but I . . ." he began.

"Come on, don't be silly . . . No need to be ashamed."

Albina took the parcel containing the tie from her bag and undid it with a vengeful pride. Sergio reflected that he was being punished for having taken pleasure in the ugliness of the tie that Luciano was to receive from Albina. Not merely was it he, instead of Luciano, who now had to wear the horrible band of silk, but he had even paid for it. Albina, chuckling ironically, turned back his collar, untied the old tie and put the new one on him, with a knot that was much too slack. "It suits you very well," she said, drawing back and admiring it. Sergio tightened the knot and said: "At least give me my old one."

Luciano put his arm round the Mexican woman's waist, laughing and whispering some joke or other. The Mexican woman defended herself feebly, making a sententious remark in a warm, hoarse voice. Then Luciano, with a quick movement, threw himself upon her and gave her a lingering kiss on the neck. The Mexican woman sat quite still, her eyes wide open, while Luciano sucked at her neck just below the ear. Afterwards, when Luciano had drawn away his head again, she shook herself and tidied her hair, exactly like a hen tidying its feathers after an assault by a cock. The waiter arrived with

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Albina's roast lamb and also with another dish for Luciano's table. "Is that for Signor Luciano?" Albina asked him.

"Yes."

"Wait a moment," Albina took the pepper-pot, a terracotta chicken with holes in its head, unscrewed it and quickly upset the whole of the pepper into Luciano's dish. The dish contained a meat hash with sauce. The waiter was alarmed. "What ever are you doing?" he asked.

"Don't you worry. I'll take the responsibility." Sergio, too, was puzzled. Albina started eating her roast lamb, her eyes fixed on Luciano. The latter had not seen her exploit with the pepper-pot and with great composure cut up a piece of meat and raised it to his mouth. Albina, stifling her laughter, gave Sergio another blow in the ribs with her elbow. "Now you'll see what a scene he'll make . . . He's so fussy about his food anyhow."

But Luciano did not make a scene. After the first mouthful, he calmly put down his knife and fork, drank half a glass of wine and lit a cigarette. Albina, repressing another burst of laughter, observed: "Just think how his mouth must be burning! But he's so proud he'd die rather than show it."

A fair-haired young man, in a ragged jacket and without a hat, came in carrying a small fibre suitcase. He opened the suitcase and proceeded, without a word, to set out a number of colored plaster statuettes on Luciano's table. The Mexican woman, to tell the truth, did not seem very eager to possess any of these statuettes; but Luciano insisted on her accepting a black and white poodle. Sergio, all of a sudden, felt Albina's hand seeking his own under the table. She took hold of his hand and then, in a loud voice, cried: "Ugh, how impatient you are! Can't you at least wait until we get home?" Sergio was confused and tried instinctively to release his hand. But Albina clung to it firmly. "Leave me alone, will you?" she said; and as

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she said it, she threw herself against Sergio and, still holding his hand tightly, pretended to be struggling with him. Sergio felt that this time he ought at least to derive some advantage from the pretence, so he tried to put his arm round Albina's waist. But she pushed him away. Luciano loudly asked the Mexican woman: "Fruit? Sweet?"

"Sweet."

"I want a sweet too," said Albina in a furious voice. A moment later the waiter brought the sweet for the two women. Luciano and Sergio, on the other hand, ate fruit. The sweet was a creamy one; the Mexican woman ate part of it and then stubbed out her cigarette in what was left. Albina, her head down, devoured the whole of her portion with her customary animal-like impetuosity and then, putting her hand to her stomach, said with a sigh of satisfaction: "Whew! I've eaten too much . . . This dress is too tight." She threw herself back on the seat and tried to undo the zip fastening of her skirt along her hip. But the skirt was so tight that she could not manage it. "Look," she said to Sergio, "pull down the zip fastening for me, will you?" He bent down, took hold of the little hook of the fastener and drew it downwards. At once Albina's round, youthful belly burst forth from the skirt, the navel clearly visible through the transparent green veil of her undergarment. "Coffee?" asked Luciano of the Mexican woman.

"Yes, coffee."

Albina was now sitting with half her belly out of her skirt; on one side, through a split in her chemise, could be seen her bare hip, brown and warm-looking, with the plump crease of her groin. A couple of strolling musicians came in, a man and a woman. He was an old man, small and thin, with a long face. His black overcoat came right down to his feet and he had a big cap pulled down over his ears. The woman was about fifty; she was tall and handsome, dressed in black, and with a

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cold, sad face. They took their instruments out of their cases and began strumming an old song. "That Mexican woman over there," remarked Albina loudly, "she oughtn't to be singing in a theatre. She ought to be going round like these two musicians, holding out a plate . . . If you only knew how out of tune she sings."

Sergio asked casually: "Does she sing in Spanish?"

"Yes, of course. I told you she doesn't know anything but Spanish."

The two musicians finished their song and Luciano beckoned to them. They went across to his table; the old man took off his cap; Luciano spoke to them and then to the Mexican. The latter tried to protest, but in the end she agreed. The two musicians, standing beside Luciano's table, settled their instruments in position and struck up a well-known Spanish song. The Mexican woman remained seated and, gazing into the void with her strange, wide-open black eyes, waited for a moment, motionless. Then she began to sing. Her voice was harsh, warm, rich in inflections that were at the same time melancholy, disdainful and sensual. In its higher ranges it acquired a tone of wildness, of greater profundity, of a sadness that seemed to be rendered discordant and angry by the abrupt falls in the refrain. Sergio at first was surprised, then admiring, and finally, in spite of himself, moved. This was due, perhaps, to the disasters of the evening, he thought, or perhaps to the momentary inclination of a mind which for too long had been drawn into trivial habits that afforded little place for affection. The Mexican, as she sang, held the musicians with her eye and every now and then gave them a sign with her hand, approving or asking them to heighten their tone. A few customers of the restaurant had appeared in the doorway and were listening in silence. Luciano did not appear to be conscious of the beauty of the singing; he was smoking with an air of combined un-

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easiness and scepticism, and it was obvious that his purpose in asking the Mexican to sing was simply to make Albina jealous. The singer came to an end of her song and sat quite still, her eyes unseeing, her hands clasped in her lap. At once there was hearty applause from the audience in the doorway. Luciano, too, applauded, but in a condescending sort of manner, without taking the cigarette out of his mouth. Sergio clapped vigorously. Albina, like a street urchin, put two fingers in her mouth and whistled.

The prolonged, shrill whistle was followed by silence. The Mexican woman looked at Albina as though she had just seen her for the first time, then rose and came towards Sergio's table. The latter was forced to recognize that Albina had been right: when the Mexican stood up, she was short, extremely short, in fact, though broad in the shoulders and with an ample, well-formed bosom. She planted herself in front of Albina and vomited forth a torrent of incomprehensible Spanish words. Yet even as she spoke thus vehemently, she kept her eyes and her face motionless. "I don't understand a word," cried Albina, "and it doesn't matter to me anyhow . . . People whistle at the theatre, don't they? I have a right to whistle as much as I like." The Mexican woman seized Sergio's full glass and flung the wine in Albina's face.

There followed a scene of confusion. Albina, wine trickling down her face and neck, had jumped to her feet and was trying to fling herself upon the Mexican. But she was prevented not only by Sergio, who held her back by the arm, but also by her unfastened skirt which was falling off her. "Redskin!" she shouted. "Let me go! I want to tear the eyes out of that Redskin!" Luciano sat motionless, smoking with an air of ostentatious, sceptical indifference. The Mexican woman had moved gradually back to her own table, and stood there, still and silent, looking at Albina. A few customers had come into the little

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room, others were looking in at the door, and all were asking what had happened. Finally Luciano called the waiter, paid the bill and, beckoning to the Mexican, left the restaurant with her.

The waiters and the musicians went away. Albina, breathless, sat down again and started wiping off the wine with her table-napkin. Some of the wine had fallen on her belly, and her undergarment, sticking to it, revealed its plump, childish rotundity. "I told you," said Sergio, "I told you it would be better not to stay here."

To his surprise he saw that Albina's rage had completely subsided. She asked him: "Do you like me?"

"Yes," said Sergio, disturbed.

"D'you want to go to bed with me?"

"Of course I do."

"Well then, just think about that and don't bother with anything else."

Sergio was sure now that Albina would give herself to him that night, even if only in order to avenge herself on Luciano. Their little room was empty now, and from the adjoining room they could not be seen. He put his arm round Albina's waist and drew her towards him to kiss her. This time she allowed herself to be kissed, and in the end, as if with a sudden kindling of her senses, she returned his kiss with rapture. She smelled strongly of wine, in a way, however, that was not repugnant but rather naïve and helpless. When they drew apart again, Albina, pulling up the fastening of her shirt, said: "Well then, shall we go?"

Sergio paid and they went out. It had stopped raining now, and the black paving-stones in the streets were gleaming under the light of the lamp-posts; the air was exhausted and flat. But it was warm, warmer than before; and again Sergio looked forward with relief to the moment when he would undress in Albina's room. The latter was walking at some distance from

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him, as though on her own, her hands in the pockets of her coat, her face bent forward and thoughtful. Her new shoes with their thick soles made her look small and thickset. "Shall we have some coffee first?" inquired Sergio.

She came close to him and placed her arm about his waist in a somewhat constrained manner. "No," she said; "let's go home . . . But you'll stay all night with me, won't you?"

She spoke in a sad voice, almost as if she were weeping. Sergio in turn put his arm round her waist and answered: "Yes, of course."

"We'll sleep together, and tomorrow morning," she concluded in a tone of entreaty, "you can go away just when you like . . . You can stay in bed until midday if you want to."

They walked through many streets and lanes and then, still with their arms round one another's waists, came to the house where Albina lived and began climbing the stairs. At the first floor Sergio kissed her on the neck. Albina said nothing.

They reached the little black door of the flat. Albina opened it with her own key and went forward into the passage. Sergio followed her, encumbered, as before, by his overcoat and umbrella. Albina opened the door of her room and exclaimed: "Why, look at that! What are *you* doing here?"

Her voice was full of joy. Sergio looked into the room and saw, first, the Mexican woman, sitting with an air of ill-humor on the sofa; and then Luciano, seated at the dressing-table, his face turned towards the door. Luciano's pose was conventional and at the same time ill-bred as he sat there with a sceptical, impudent smile on his face, his cigarette held between two fingers. Sergio felt he could even recollect a similar scene in some film or other. Irritated, he said to himself: "That's done it!"—and entered the room.

Albina went straight over to Luciano and took up her position beside him with her hand on his shoulder, in an attitude

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of defiance, as it were, towards Sergio and the Mexican. Luciano, just like a bad film actor, took a long pull at his cigarette, let forth a cloud of smoke and then said, with an affected drawl: "Splendid, splendid, that's really splendid . . . So I was quite right, wasn't I, eh? . . . You were just longing for it. A fine sort of friend, I must say . . ."

Sergio felt himself blushing. It was not so much that he had been caught in the act, as that he now found himself in a position of inferiority in relation to a man he despised. He reflected, however, that it's an ill wind that blows no one any good: this, surely, was the moment to break with his friend. And so, forcing himself to a tone of resentment, he said: "In any case I'm not your friend."

"Well, what then?" said Luciano dramatically.

"Furthermore," went on Sergio, "Albina is not your wife. She's free to go with anyone she likes. She asked me to come up here and I came."

"Is that true?" demanded Luciano, turning to Albina.

It was all turning out exactly like a scene in a film. Albina burst out with a vehement contradiction. "No, it's not true, he's a liar. It was he who kept on insisting. I didn't in the least want him to come . . . he forced his way in." She had taken Luciano's hand and was kissing it, frantically, on the palm and on the back.

"So you're a liar too," said Luciano with a mocking laugh.

"Oh, go to hell," cried Sergio fervently.

The Mexican woman got up from the sofa, went over to Sergio and, placing a hand on his shoulder, said something that Sergio did not understand but which he interpreted as: "Let it be . . . You'd better go away." He thrust her from him and went on angrily: "Let it be understood that from now onwards everything's finished between us. If you happen to meet me, I forbid you absolutely to greet me or speak to me . . ."

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"Vamos," said the Mexican woman, trying to draw him towards the door. With unexpected mildness Luciano answered: "Don't be angry; there's no harm done. We'll go on being friends just the same . . . After all, it's only human, you were attracted by Albina . . . But now you can go with Consuelo. I've talked to her about you, and she likes the look of you . . . Consuelo, you go off together, you two; go off and make love together." He made an expressive gesture with his hand. But the Mexican woman shrugged her shoulders and answered him with a remark that was contemptuous and cutting in its tone, as though to make him understand that she was accepting no advice from him and would act on her own initiative. Luciano started laughing and Albina, sure now of getting what she wanted, let go of his hand, went round behind the dressing-table and proceeded to take off her coat. The Mexican succeeded in pulling Sergio by the arm out of the room and then shut the door.

She spoke a few words in Spanish, as if to say good-bye, and held out her hand. Sergio shook it automatically. She turned her back on him and went to a door half-way along the passage. So she lived, evidently, in the same house as Albina. All at once Sergio felt his face and ears burning and was seized again with the same fierce desire to undress that had pursued him all the evening. He ran after the Mexican, who was just entering her room, and, pulling a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, offered her one. She took a cigarette and, without saying a word, ushered him into the room, closing the door behind them.

It was a square room, small and very low, furnished with the same sort of poor, shabby furniture as Albina's. The only difference was that here, in place of the sofa, there was a real double bed, with a white coverlet and a curly black iron bedstead. The long, low window seemed to look out under a projecting cornice, and through the glass could be seen the vibrat-

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ing reflection of a neon sign. This reflection cast stripes of red and purple on the wall opposite the window and on the ceiling. The Mexican woman moved hither and thither about the room, talking ceaselessly now, in a harsh, sensible tone, giving him, it seemed, a kind of motherly lecture. With her warm, rapid, sententious way of speaking, she appeared to be saying to him: "Really you are a silly, heedless boy. Didn't you realize that Albina was not thinking of anyone but Luciano the whole time? But now you're here with me, and I'll do all I can to console you." He felt comforted by her voice although he did not understand a word she said, and he remembered how she had sung and had a great wish to hear her sing again. In the meantime the Mexican had disappeared behind a screen which evidently concealed the wash-stand.

With infinite relief he began to undress. He took off his overcoat and then he took off his shoes and socks. From his feet, which were red and swollen, there rose a coolness right up to his brain, and for a moment he sat looking at them with pleasure and moving his toes. Then he took off his suit, his shirt and his underclothes, and felt that his body, like his feet, was able to breathe again. When he was naked, he crossed his legs, lit a cigarette and, for the first time during the whole course of the evening, felt comfortable.

But he had no desire to make love. He wished he knew Spanish and could tell the Mexican woman that he wanted to hear her sing. He looked at the corner of the wash-stand and saw that her clothes were piled up, all anyhow, on top of the screen. Then she came out.

Now that she was quite naked, her squat, exotic appearance was even more clearly revealed. Watching her coming towards him across the red and black lozenges of the floor, he felt he was being approached by a statue of an Aztec divinity which he had happened to see some time before in a museum.

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Like that statue, the Mexican woman had short, thick legs, so short and thick, indeed, that they made you think her feet were attached to her knees. On top of these legs her torso, disproportionately long, stood bolt upright in a manner that seemed unnatural. Her buttocks were flat, her belly large and protuberant, with the navel sunk deeply in the flesh. Her breasts were oblong, like two gourds with their ends cut off, and they stood out stiff and firm, one pointing this way and one that. At the top of her long neck, round which coiled a thin black tress of hair, her face was motionless, without expression; and her feet rested with their entire soles flat on the floor, like those of her native land's divinities. She passed in front of the window, and the neon lights threw a reflection across her face and her breast, a red and purple reflection exactly like a piece of barbaric tattooing. From her hand hung a towel, and she held it out to him, nodding in the direction of the screen, as if inviting him to wash. But Sergio refused the towel and said: "No, no, not love . . . Sing, sing"; and he opened his mouth and placed his hand on his chest.

She understood at once and smiled with professional satisfaction. She threw the towel on the bed, bent down towards Sergio and, taking his chin in the palm of her hand, as one does with a child, said something to him in a lively, caressing voice, in a tone of flattering commendation; then she gave him a little slap on the cheek. Sergio smiled gratefully at her. She sat down on the bed at a little distance from him, and took hold of his hand as it rested on the coverlet. Her own hand was large, rough and cool. She clasped his hand, crossed her short legs, gazed for a moment straight in front of her with black, shining eyes and then, swelling out her chest as though with a sudden inspiration, began to sing.

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Leslie A. Fiedler

THE NOVEL AND AMERICA*

Between the novel and America there are peculiar and intimate connections. A new literary form and a new society, their beginnings coincide with the beginnings of the modern era and, indeed, help to define it. We are living not only in the Age of America but also in the Age of the Novel, at a moment when the literature of a country without a first-rate verse epic or a memorable verse tragedy has become the model of half the world. *The Age of the American Novel,* a French critic calls a book on contemporary writing; and everywhere in the West there are authors who quite deliberately turn from their own fictional traditions to pursue ours—or at least something they take for ours.

We have known for a long time, of course, that our national literary reputation depends largely upon the achievement of our novelists. The classical poetic genres revived by the Renaissance had lost their relevance to contemporary life before America entered the cultural scene; and even the lyric has provided us with occasions for few, and unlimited, triumphs. Whitman, Poe, and Dickinson—beyond these three, there are no major American poets before the twentieth century; and even about their merits we continue to wrangle. It is Melville and Hawthorne and James (together with such latter-day figures as Faulkner and Hemingway) who possess the imagination of a

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Europe already committed to the novel as the prevailing modern form. Not only in the United States, though pre-eminently there, literature has become for most readers quite simply prose fiction; and our endemic fantasy of writing "the Great American Novel" is only a local instance of a more general obsession. The notions of greatness once associated with the heroic poem have been transferred to the novel; and the shift is a part of that "Americanization of culture" which some European intellectuals continue ritually to deplore.

But is there, as certain continental critics have insisted, an "American novel," a specific sub-variety of the form? If we turn to these critics for a definition, we come on such terms as "neo-realist," "hard-boiled," "naive," and "anti-traditional"—terms derived from a standard view of America as an "anti-culture," an eternally maintained preserve of primitivism. This view (notoriously exemplified by André Gide) ends by finding in Dashiell Hammett the same values as in William Faulkner, and is more a symptom of European cultural malaise than a useful critical distinction. While America is, in a very real sense, a constantly re-created fact of the European imagination, it is not only, or even pre-eminently, that. It is tempting to insist on the pat rebuttal that, far from being an anti-culture, we are merely a branch of Western culture; and that there is no "American novel," only local variants of standard European kinds of fiction: American sentimental, American gothic, American historical romance, etc. Certainly no single sub-genre of the novel was invented in the United States. Yet the peculiarities of our variants seem more interesting and important than their resemblances to the parent forms.

There is a real sense in which our prose fiction is immediately distinguishable from that of Europe, though this is a fact that is difficult for Americans (oddly defensive and flustered in its presence) to confess. In this sense, our novels seem not primi-

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tive, perhaps, but innocent, unfallen in a disturbing way, almost juvenile. The great works of American fiction are notoriously at home in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent. This is part of what we mean when we talk about the incapacity of the American novelist to develop; in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with his childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody.

Merely finding a language, learning to talk in a land where there are no conventions of conversation, no special class idioms and no dialogue between classes, no continuing literary language —this exhausts the American writer. He is forever *beginning,* saying for the first time (without real tradition there can never be a second time) what it is like to stand alone before nature, or in a city as appallingly lonely as any virgin forest. He faces, moreover, another problem, which has resulted in a failure of feeling and imagination perceptible at the heart of even our most notable works. Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of a man and woman, which we expect at the center of a novel. Indeed, they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full-fledged, mature women, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of the rejection or fear of sexuality.

To be sure, the theme of "love" in so simple a sense is by no means necessary to all works of art. In the *Iliad,* for instance, and in much Greek tragedy, it is conspicuously absent; and in the heroic literature of the Middle Ages, it is peripheral where it exists at all. The *"belle Aude"* of the *Chanson de Roland* is a supernumerary, and the only female we remember from *Beowulf* is a terror emerging from the darkness at the bottom of the waters. The world of the epic is a world of war, and its reigning

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sentimental relationship is the loyalty of comrades in arms; but by the eighteenth century the notion of a heroic poem without romance had come to seem intolerable. The last pseudo-epics of the baroque had been obsessed with the subject of love, and the rococo had continued to elaborate that theme. Shakespeare himself appeared to the English Augustans too little concerned with the "reigning passion" to be quite interesting without revision. Why, after all, should Cordelia not survive to marry Edgar, they demanded of themselves—and they rewrote *King Lear* to prove that she should.

The novel, however, was precisely the product of the sentimentalizing taste of the eighteenth century; and a continuing tradition of prose fiction did not begin until the love affair of Lovelace and Clarissa (a demythicized Don Juan and a secularized goddess of Christian love) had been imagined. The subject par excellence of the novel is love or, more precisely—in its beginnings at least—seduction and marriage; and in France, Italy, Germany, and Russia, even in England, spiritually so close to America, love in one form or another has remained the novel's central theme, as necessary and as expected as battle in Homer or revenge in the Renaissance drama. When the Romantic impulse led in Germany to a technical recasting of the novel form, even the wildest experimentalists did not desert this traditional theme; Schiller's *Lucille* is a dialogue on freedom and restraint in passion. But our great Romantic *Unroman,* our typical anti-novel, is the womanless *Moby Dick.*

Where is our *Madame Bovary,* our *Anna Karenina,* our *Pride and Prejudice* or *Vanity Fair?* Among our classic novels, at least those before Henry James, who stands so oddly between our own traditions and the European ones we rejected or recast, the best attempt at dealing with love is *The Scarlet Letter,* in which the physical consummation of adultery has occurred and all passion burned away before the novel proper begins. Our

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Madame Bovary is a novel about adultery with the adultery offstage; and the child who is its product is so elfin and ethereal that it is hard to believe her engendered in the usual way. For the rest, there are *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn, The Last of the Mohicans, The Red Badge of Courage,* the stories of Edgar Allan Poe—books that turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of wooing, marriage, and child-bearing.

The figure of Rip Van Winkle presides over the birth of the American imagination; and it is fitting that our first successful homegrown legend should memorialize, however playfully, the flight of the dreamer from the shrew—into the mountains and out of time, away from the drab duties of home and town toward the good companions and the magic keg of beer. Ever since, the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid "civilization," which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility. One of the factors that determine theme and form in our great books is this strategy of evasion, this retreat to nature and childhood which makes our literature (and life!) so charmingly and infuriatingly "boyish."

The child's world is not only asexual, it is terrible: a world of fear and loneliness, a haunted world; and the American novel is pre-eminently a novel of terror. To "light out for the territory" or seek refuge in the forest seems easy and tempting from the vantage point of a chafing and restrictive home; but civilization once disavowed and Christianity disowned, the bulwark of woman left behind, the wanderer feels himself without protection, more motherless child than free man. To be sure, there is a substitute for wife or mother presumably waiting in the green heart of nature: the natural man, the good companion, pagan and unashamed—Queequeg or Chingachgook or Nigger Jim.

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But the figure of the natural man is ambiguous, a dream and a nightmare at once. The other face of Chingachgook is Injun Joe, the killer in the graveyard and the haunter of caves; Nigger Jim is also the Babo of Melville's "Benito Cereno," the humble servant whose name means "papa" holding the razor to his master's throat; and finally the dark-skinned companion becomes the "Black Man," which is a traditional American name for the Devil himself.

The enemy of society on the run toward "freedom" is also the pariah in flight from his guilt, the guilt of that very flight; and new phantoms arise to haunt him at every step. American literature likes to pretend, of course, that its bugaboos are all finally jokes: the headless horseman a hoax, every manifestation of the supernatural capable of rational explanation on the last page—but we are never quite convinced. *Huckleberry Finn,* that euphoric boys' book, begins with its protagonist holding off at gun point his father driven half mad by the D.T.'s and ends (after a lynching, a disinterment, and a series of violent deaths relieved by such humorous incidents as soaking a dog in kerosene and setting him on fire) with the revelation of that father's sordid death. Nothing is spared; Pap, horrible enough in life, is found murdered brutally, abandoned to float down the river in a decaying house scrawled with obscenities. But it is all "humor" of course, a last desperate attempt to convince us of the innocence of violence, the good clean fun of horror. Our literature as a whole at times seems a chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park "fun house," where we pay to play at terror and are confronted in the innermost chamber with a series of inter-reflecting mirrors which present us with a thousand versions of our own face.

In our most enduring books, the cheapjack machinery of the gothic novel is called on to represent the hidden blackness of the human soul and human society. No wonder our authors

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mock themselves as they use such devices; no wonder Mistress Hibbins in *The Scarlet Letter* and Fedallah in *Moby Dick* are treated half jocularly, half melodramatically, though each represents in his book the Faustian pact, the bargain with the Devil, which our authors have always felt as the essence of the American experience. However shoddily or ironically treated, horror is essential to our literature. It is not merely a matter of terror filling the vacuum left by the suppression of sex in our novels, of Thanatos standing in for Eros. Through these gothic images are projected certain obsessive concerns of our national life: the ambiguity of our relationship with Indian and Negro, the ambiguity of our encounter with nature, the guilt of the revolutionist who feels himself a parricide—and, not least of all, the uneasiness of the writer who cannot help believing that the very act of composing a book is Satanic revolt. "Hell-fired," Hawthorne called *The Scarlet Letter,* and Melville thought his own *Moby Dick* a "wicked book."

The American writer inhabits a country at once the dream of Europe and a fact of history; he lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence—on the "frontier," which is to say, the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face. To express this "blackness ten times black" and to live by it in a society in which, since the decline of orthodox Puritanism, optimism has become the chief effective religion, is a complex and difficult task.

It was to the novel that the American writer turned most naturally, as the only *popular* form of sufficient magnitude for his vision. He was, perhaps, not sufficiently sophisticated to realize that such learned forms as epic and tragedy had already outlived their usefulness; but, working out of a cultural background at best sketchy and unsure, he felt insecure before them. His obligations urged him in the direction of tragedy, but traditional verse tragedy was forbidden him; indeed, a chief technical prob-

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lem for American novelists has been the adaptation of nontragic forms to tragic ends. How could the dark vision of the American —his obsession with violence and his embarrassment before love —be expressed in the sentimental novel of analysis as developed by Samuel Richardson or the historical romance as practiced by Sir Walter Scott? These subgenres of fiction, invented to satisfy the emotional needs of a merchant class in search of dignity or a Tory squirearchy consumed by nostalgia, could only by the most desperate expedients be tailored to fit American necessities. Throughout their writing lives, such writers as Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper devoted (with varying degrees of self-consciousness) all their ingenuity to this task, yet neither Brown nor Cooper finally proved capable of achieving high art; and the literary types invented by both have fallen since into the hands of mere entertainers—that is, novelists able and willing to attempt anything *except* the projection of the dark vision of America we have been describing. The Fielding novel, on the other hand, the pseudo-Shakespearean "comic epic" with its broad canvas, its emphasis upon reversals and recognitions, and its robust masculine sentimentality, turned out, oddly enough, to have no relevance to the American scene; in the United States it has remained an exotic, eternally being discovered by the widest audience and raised to best-sellerdom in its latest imported form, but seldom home-produced for home consumption.

It is the gothic form that has been most fruitful in the hands of our best writers: the gothic *symbolically* understood, its machinery and décor translated into metaphors for a terror psychological, social, and metaphysical. Yet even treated as symbols, the machinery and décor of the gothic have continued to seem vulgar and contrived; symbolic gothicism threatens always to dissolve into its components, abstract morality and shoddy theater. A recurrent problem of our fiction has been the need of our

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novelists to find a mode of projecting their conflicts which would contain all the dusky horror of gothic romance and yet be palatable to discriminating readers, palatable first of all to themselves.

Such a mode can, of course, not be subsumed among any of those called "realism," and one of the chief confusions in our understanding of our own literature has arisen from our failure to recognize this fact clearly enough. Our fiction is essentially and at its best nonrealistic, even anti-realistic; long before *symbolisme* had been invented in France and exported to America, there was a full-fledged native tradition of symbolism. That tradition was born of the profound contradictions of our national life and sustained by the inheritance from Puritanism of a "typical" (even allegorical) way of regarding the sensible world—not as an ultimate reality but as a system of signs to be deciphered. For too long, historians of American fiction have mistakenly tried to impose on the course of a brief literary history a notion of artistic "progress" imported from France or, more precisely perhaps, from certain French literary critics. Such historians have been pleased to speak of "The Rise of Realism" or "The Triumph of Realism," as if the experiments of Hawthorne or Poe or Melville were helf-misguided fumblings toward the final excellence of William Dean Howells!

But the moment at which Flaubert was dreaming *Madame Bovary* was the moment when Melville was finding *Moby Dick*, and considered as a "realistic" novel the latter is a scandalous botch. To speak of a counter-tradition to the novel, of the tradition of "the romance" as a force in our literature, is merely to repeat the rationalizations of our writers themselves; it is certainly to fail to be *specific* enough for real understanding. Our fiction is not merely in flight from the physical data of the actual world, in search of a (sexless and dim) Ideal; from Charles Brockden Brown to William Faulkner or Eudora Welty, Paul Bowles or John Hawkes, it is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly,

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a gothic fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation.

Moreover—and the final paradox is necessary to the full complexity of the case—ours is a literature of horror for boys. Truly shocking, frankly obscene authors we do not possess; Edgar Allan Poe is our closest approximation, a child playing at what Baudelaire was to live. A Baudelaire, a Marquis de Sade, a "Monk" Lewis, even a John Cleland is inconceivable in the United States. Our flowers of evil are culled for the small girl's bouquet, our novels of terror (*Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn,* the tales of Poe) are placed on the approved book lists of Parents' Committees who nervously fuss over the latest comic books. If such censors do not flinch at necrophilia or shudder over the book whose secret motto is "I baptise you not in the name of the Father . . . but of the Devil," or fear the juvenile whose hero at his greatest moment cries out, "All right, I'll *go* to Hell," it is only another irony of life in a land where the writers believe in hell and the official guardians of morality do not. As long as there's no *sex!*

Yet our authors are as responsible as the P.T.A.'s for the confusion about the true nature of their books; though they may have whispered their secret to friends, or confessed it in private letters, in their actual works they assumed what camouflage prudence dictated. They *wanted* to be misunderstood. *Huckleberry Finn* is only the supreme instance of a subterfuge typical of our classic novelists. To this very day, it is heresy in some quarters to insist that this is not finally the jolliest, the *cleanest* of books; Twain's ironical warning to significance hunters, posted just before the title page, is taken quite literally, and the irreverent critic who explicates the book's levels of terror and evasion is regarded as a busybody and scandalmonger. It is at last hard to say which is more remarkable, the eccentricity of American books

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or our critics' conspiracy of silence in this regard. (Or is it the critics' *unawareness* of the fact?) Why, one is driven to ask, why the distortion and why the ignorance? But the critics, after all, are children of the same culture as the novelists they discuss; and if we answer one question we will have answered both.

Perhaps the whole odd shape of American fiction arises simply (as simplifying Europeans are always ready to assure us) because there is no real sexuality in American life and therefore there cannot very well be any in American art. What we cannot achieve in our relations with each other it would be vain to ask our writers to portray or even our critics to miss. Certainly many of our novelists have themselves believed, or pretended to believe, this. Through *The Scarlet Letter,* there is a constant mournful undercurrent, a series of asides in which Hawthorne deplores the sexual diminution of American women. Mark Twain in *1601* somewhat similarly contrasts the vigor of Elizabethan Englishwomen with their American descendants; contrasting the sexual utopia of pre-colonial England with a fallen America where the men copulate "but once in seven yeeres"; and his pornographic sketch, written to amuse a clergyman friend (for men only!), ends on the comic-pathetic image of an old man's impotent lust that "would not stand again." Such pseudo-nostalgia cannot be taken too seriously, however; it may, indeed, be the projection of mere personal weakness and fantasy. Certainly, outside their books, Hawthorne and Twain seem to have fled rather than sought the imaginary full-breasted, fully sexed woman from whom American ladies had presumably declined. Both married, late in life, pale hypochondriac spinsters, intellectual invalids—as if to assert publicly that they sought in marriage not sex but culture!

Such considerations leave us trapped in the chicken-egg dilemma. How can one say whether the quality of passion in American life suffers because of a failure of the writer's imagina-

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tion or vice versa? What is called "love" in literature is a rationalization, a way of coming to terms with the relationship between man and woman that does justice, on the one hand, to certain biological drives and, on the other, to certain generally accepted conventions of tenderness and courtesy; and literature, expressing and defining those conventions, tends to influence "real life" more than such life influences it. For better or for worse and for whatever reasons, the American novel is different from its European prototypes, and one of its essential differences arises from its chary treatment of woman and of sex.

To write, then, about the American novel is to write about the fate of certain European genres in a world of alien experience. It is not only a world where courtship and marriage have suffered a profound change, but also one in the process of losing the traditional distinctions of class; a world without significant history or a substantial past; a world which had left behind the terror of Europe not for the innocence it dreamed of, but for new and special guilts associated with the rape of nature and the exploitation of dark-skinned people; a world doomed to play out the imaginary childhood of Europe. The American novel is only *finally* American; its appearance is an event in the history of the European spirit—as, indeed, is the very invention of America itself.

II

Though it is necessary, in understanding the fate of the American novel, to understand what European prototypes were available when American literature began, as well as which ones flourished and which ones disappeared on our soil, it is even more important to understand the meaning of that moment in the mid-eighteenth century which gave birth to Jeffersonian democracy and Richardsonian sentimentality alike: to the myth of revolution and the myth of seduction. When Charles Brockden Brown, the first professional American author, sent a copy

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of his *Wieland* to Thomas Jefferson in 1798, he must, beneath his modest disclaimers, have had some sense of his and the President's kinship as revolutionaries. "I am therefore obliged to hope," Brown wrote, "that . . . the train of eloquent and judicious reasoning . . . will be regarded by Thomas Jefferson with as much respect as . . . me." But if Jefferson ever found the time to read Brown's novel, he left no record; we know only that he expressed general approval of "works of the imagination" as being able, more than history, to "possess virtue in the best and vice in the worst forms possible." It is a chillingly rational approach to art and a perhaps sufficient indication of the hopelessness of Brown's attempting in those sensible years to live by his writing.

Yet despite the fact that no professional novelist of real seriousness was to find a supporting public in America for twenty-five or thirty years more, Brown's instincts had not deceived him. He and Jefferson *were* engaged in a common enterprise; the novel and America did not come into existence at the same time by accident. They are the two great inventions of the bourgeois, Protestant mind at the moment when it stood, on the one hand, between Rationalism and Sentimentalism, and on the other, between the drive for economic power and the need for cultural autonomy. The series of events which includes the rise of modern psychology, and the triumph of the lyric in poetry, adds up to a psychic revolution as well as a social one—perhaps first of all to a psychic revolution. This revolution, viewed as an overturning of ideas and artistic forms, has traditionally been called "Romantic"; but the term is paralyzingly narrow, defining too little too precisely, and leading to further pointless distinctions between Romanticism proper, pre-Romanticism, *Stürm und Drang,* Sentimentalism, *Symbolisme,* etc. It seems preferable to call the whole continuing, complex event simply "the Break-through," thus emphasizing the dramatic entry of a new voice into the dialogue of Western man with his various selves.

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The Break-through is characterized not only by the separation of psychology from philosophy, the displacement of the traditional leading genres by the personal lyric and analytic prose fiction (with the consequent subordination of plot to character); it is also marked by the promulgation of a theory of revolution as a good in itself and, most notably perhaps, by a new concept of inwardness. One is almost tempted to say, by the invention of a new kind of self, a new level of mind; for what has been happening since the eighteenth century seems more like the development of a new organ than the mere finding of a new way to describe old experience. The triumph, for instance, of the theory that insanity is not possession by forces outside the psyche but a failure within the psyche itself is a representative aspect of the change-over.

It was Diderot who represented a first real awareness (as Freud represents a final one) that man is *double* to the final depths of his soul, the prey of conflicting psyches both equally himself. The conflict had, of course, always been felt, but had traditionally been described as occurring between man and devil, or flesh and spirit; that the parties to the dispute are both man and spirit was a revolutionary suggestion. In his demi-novel, *Rameau's Nephew,* Diderot projected the conflicting divisions within man's mind as the philosopher and the parasite, the rationalist and the underground man, debating endlessly the cause of the head versus that of the gut. And in his pornographic *Bijoux Indiscrets,* he proposed another version of the same dialogue: the enchanted (and indiscreet) genitals speak the truth which the mouth will not avow, thus comprising an allegorical defense of pornography in the guise of a pornographic work. In the same year in which Richardson's sentimental novel *Clarissa* was published, John Cleland's long-lived dirty book *The Memoirs of Fanny Hill* was making a stir. Pornography and obscenity are, indeed, hallmarks of the age of the Break-through. Not only pious novels but titillating ones show the emergence of the

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underground emotions (of what the period itself euphemistically called "the heart") into high culture. Quite as influential as Diderot (or Richardson or Rousseau) in the *bouleversement* of the eighteenth century is the Marquis de Sade, who stands almost emblematically at the crossroads of depth psychology and revolution.

Not only did de Sade shed new light on the ambivalence of the inner mind, revealing the true darkness and terror implicit in the drive which the neo-classical age (revolting against Christian notions of sin) had been content to celebrate as simple "pleasure" or polite "gallantry"; he may even have caused that symbolic storming of an almost empty prison with which the French Revolution begins. Himself a prisoner in the *Tour de la liberté* of the Bastille, de Sade, through an improvised loudspeaker made of a tube and funnel, screamed to bystanders to rescue his fellow inmates who were having their throats cut—and scattered handwritten leaflets complaining about jail conditions to the crowd he attracted. On July 3, 1789, he was finally transferred elsewhere to insure "the safety of the building," but not before he had started to write *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, that perverse offshoot of the Richardsonian novel, and had thus begun to create the first example of revolutionary pornography, Maurice Blanchot, in an essay called *Lautréamont et Sade*, describes his method as follows: "What is striking is this: the language of de Sade is precisely opposite to the cheating language of hangmen; it is the language of the victim; he invented it in the Bastille. . . . He put on trial, reversing the process of his own judgment, the men who condemned him, God himself, and —in general—every limitation against which his frenzy clashed. . . ."

In the Marquis de Sade, the Break-through found its most stringent and spectacular spokesman: the condemned man judging his judges, the pervert mocking the normal, the advocate of destruction and death sneering at the defenders of love and life;

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but his *reductio* follows logically enough from assumptions shared by Jefferson and Rousseau, Richardson and Saint-Just. Whatever has been suspect, outcast, and denied is postulated as the source of good. Before the Break-through, no one, Christian or Humanist, had doubted the inferiority of passion to reason, of impulse to law; and though it is possible sophistically to justify all eighteenth-century reversals by quoting the verse which says the last shall be first, Christianity is dead from the moment such a justification is made. The Break-through, the triumphant intrusion of the libido into the place of virtue and reason, is profoundly anti-Christian though it is not always willing to appear so. There is a brief age of transition when the Enlightenment and Sentimentalism exist side by side, when it is still possible to pretend that true reason and true feeling, the urgings of passion and the dictates of virtue are identical—and that all are alike manifestations of the orthodox God. But Sentimentalism yields quickly to the full Romantic revolt; in a matter of months, Don Juan, enemy of Heaven and the family, has been transformed from villain to hero; and before the process is finished, audiences have learned to weep for Shylock rather than laugh him from the stage. The legendary rebels and outcasts, Prometheus and Cain, Judas and the Wandering Jew, Faust and Lucifer himself are one by one redeemed. The parricide becomes an object of veneration, and tourists (among them that good American abroad, Herman Melville) carry home as an icon Guido's picture of Beatrice Cenci, slayer of her father!

The process is continuous and nearly universal. Even the values of language change: "gothic" passes from a term of contempt to one of description and then of praise, while "baroque" makes more slowly the same transition; meanwhile terms once used honorifically to describe desired traits—"condescension," for example—become indicators of disapproval. The child is glorified over the man, the peasant over the courtier, the dark man over the white, the rude ballad over the polished sonnet, the

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weeper over the thinker, colony over mother country, the commoner over the king—nature over culture. At first, all this is a game: the ladies of the court in pastoral dress swing high into the air to show their legs with a self-consciousness quite unlike the abandon of children to which they are pretending. But in a little while, Jean-Jacques Rousseau has fainted on the road to Vincennes and awakended to find his waistcoat soaked with tears; and it is suddenly all in earnest. Whatever was down is now up, as the under-mind heaves up out of the darkness: barricades are erected and the novel becomes the reigning form; the Jew walks openly out of the ghetto, and otherwise sensible men hang on their walls pictures of trees and cattle. The conjunctions are comic in their unexpectedness and variety.

It is hard to say what was cause and what effect in the complex upheaval; everything seems the symptom of everything else. Yet deep within the nexus of causes (gods must die for new genres to be born) was that "death of God" that has not yet ceased to trouble our peace. Somewhere near the beginning of the eighteenth century, Christianity (more precisely, perhaps, that desperate compromise of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Christian Humanism) began to wear out. It was not merely, or even primarily, a matter of the destruction of the political and social power of one Church or another, much less of the lapse of economic control by the priests. The divisions within Christendom surely contributed to the final collapse, but they are perhaps better regarded as manifestations than as causes of the insecurity over dogma that was at work deep within. Institutionalized Christianity at any rate began to crumble when its God began to fail, that is to say, when its mythology no longer proved capable of controlling and revivifying the imagination of Europe.

The darker motive forces of the psyche refused any longer to accept the names and ranks by which they had been demeaned for almost two thousand years; once worshiped as "gods,"

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they had been made demons by fiat, but now they stirred again in discontent. Especially the Great Mother—cast down by the most patriarchal of all religions (to the Hebrews, she was Lilith, the bride of darkness), ambiguously redeemed as the Blessed Virgin and denied once more by a Hebraizing Protestantism—clamored to be honored once more. The very distinction between God and Devil, on which the psychic balance of Europe had for so long been staked, was threatened. It did not matter that some people (chiefly women) continued to go to church, or even that there were revivals within the framework of surviving sects; fewer and fewer men lived by the legends of the church, and the images of saints represented not living myths but "mythology" in a literary sense, tales to be read for amusement or "analyzed" in the light of the teachings of anthropology or psychology. There remained only the job of carrying the news of God's death to those who had not yet heard the word.

The effect of the growing awareness (an awareness, to be sure, at first shared by only a handful of advanced thinkers) of this cosmic catastrophe was double: a sense of exhilaration and a spasm of terror, to which correspond the two initial and overlapping stages of the Break-through. There was first of all the conviction of the Age of Reason and its spokesmen, the *philosophes,* grave-diggers of the Christian God, that they—and all of mankind—were at last *free,* free of the superstition and ignorance so long sponsored by the priests for their own selfish ends. Those demons into which the early Christian apologists had translated the gods of antiquity seemed to the *philosophes* idle inventions of the Church itself: bugaboos to scare the pious into unquestioning subservience. Even the Christian God seemed to them such a contrivance, demonic and irrational. In the imagined universe presided over by their own "Author of Creation," there could be no place for mystery or blackness. Once *"l'infâme,"* the scandalous Church, had been crushed, all monsters would be eliminated forever, and man could take up his long,

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baffled march toward perfection in a sweet, sunlit, orderly world. Just such a vision, however modified by circumstance, moved the Deist intellectuals who founded America, especially that Thomas Jefferson to whom C. B. Brown, himself a follower of the *philosophes,* proffered his gothic novel.

Insofar as America is legendary, a fact of the imagination as well as one of history, it has been shaped by the ideals of the Age of Reason. To be sure, the European mind had dreamed for centuries before the Enlightenment of an absolute West: Atlantis, Ultima Thule, the Western Isles—a place of refuge beyond the seas, to which the hero retreats to await rebirth, a source of new life in the direction of the setting sun which seems to stand for death. Dante, however, on the very brink of an age which was to turn the dream into the actualities of exploration, had prophetically sent to destruction in the West, Ulysses, the archetypal explorer. The direction of his westward journey through the great sea is identified with the sinister left hand; and Ulysses himself comes to stand for man's refusal to accept the simple limits of traditional duty: "not the sweetness of having a son, nor the pious claim of an old father, nor the licit love that should have made Penelope rejoice could quench in me the burning to become familiar with the vice of men and men's valor." It is a fitting enough epigraph to represent that lust for experience which made America. There is, indeed, something blasphemous in the very act by which America was established, a gesture of defiance that began with the symbolic breaching of the pillars of Hercules, long considered the divine signs of limit.

To be sure, the poets of later Catholicism made an effort to recast the dream of America in terms viable for their Counter-Reformation imaginations, to forge a myth that would subserve new political exigencies. It was not accident, they boasted, that the discoverer of America (sponsored by those most Catholic defenders of the Faith) had been called Cristoforo Colombo, "the Christ-bearing dove." Had he not carried orthodoxy into a

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world of unredeemed pagans, a reservoir of souls providentially kept in darkness until they were needed to replace the lapsed Christians of heretical northern Europe?

It is however, the Enlightenment's vision of America rather than that of the Church that was written into our documents and has become the substance of our deepest sense of ourselves and our destiny. If North America had remained Latin, the story might have been different; but Jefferson himself presided over the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, which settled that question once and for all. History sometimes provides suitable symbolic occasions, and surely one of them is the scene that finds Jefferson and Napoleon, twin heirs of the Age of Reason, preparing the way for Lewis and Clark, that is to say, for the first actors in our own drama of a perpetually retreating West. Napoleon, it must be remembered, was the sponsor of the painter David and Jefferson the planner of Monticello; good neo-classicists both, they place the American myth firmly in the classicizing, neo-Roman tradition of the late eighteenth century. The New World is, of course, in one sense an older one than Europe, a preserve of the primitive, last refuge of antique virtue; indeed the writers and artists of the Empire period could never quite tell the difference between Americans, red or white, and the inhabitants of the Roman Republic. The face of Washington, as rendered in bronze by Houdon, is that of the noblest Roman of them all, or, in Byron's phrase (already a cliché), "the Cincinnatus of the West."

But America is not exclusively the product of Reason—not even in the area of legend. Behind its neo-classical facade, ours is a nation sustained by a sentimental and Romantic dream, the dream of an escape from culture and a renewal of youth. Beside the *philosophes,* with whom he seemed at first to accord so well that they scarcely knew he was their profoundest enemy, stands Rousseau. It is his compelling vision of a society uncompromised by culture, of simple piety and virtue bred by "Nature," i.e., the

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untended landscape, that has left the deepest impress on the American mind. The heirs of Rousseau are Chateaubriand and Cooper, after whom the world of togas and marble brows and antique heroism is replaced by the sylvan scene, across which the melancholy refugee plods in search of the mysterious Niagara, or where Natty Bumppo, buckskinned savior, leans on his long rifle and listens for the sound of a cracking twig. The bronze face of a bewigged Washington gives way to the image of young Abe splitting logs in a Kentucky clearing.

The dream of the Republic is quite a different thing from that of the Revolution. The vision of blood and fire as ritual purification, the need to cast down what is up, to degrade the immemorial images of authority, to impose equality as the ultimate orthodoxy—these came from the *Encyclopédie,* perhaps, as abstract ideas; but the spirit in which they were lived was that of full-blown Romanticism. The Revolution of 1789 (for which ours was an ideological dress rehearsal) may have set up David as its official interpreter, but it left the world to Delacroix; and though it enthroned Reason as its goddess, it prepared for a more unruly Muse.

In Sentimentalism, the Age of Reason dissolves in a debauch of tearfulness; sensibility, seduction, and suicide haunt its art even before ghosts and graveyards take over—strange images of darkness to usher in an era of freedom from fear. And beneath them lurks the realization that the devils which had persisted from antiquity into Christianity were not dead but only driven inward; that the "tyranny of superstition," far from being the fabrication of a Machiavellian priesthood, was a projection of a profound inner insecurity and guilt, a hidden world of nightmare not abolished by manifestos or restrained by barricades. The final horrors, as modern society has come to realize, are neither gods nor demons, but intimate aspects of our own minds.

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POEMS

AN URBAN CONVALESCENCE

Out for a walk, after a week in bed,
I find them tearing up part of my block
And, chilled through, lonely and dazed, I join the dozen
In meek attitudes, watching a huge crane
Fumble luxuriously in the filth of years.
Her jaws dribble rubble. An old man
Laughs and curses in her brain,
Bringing to mind the close of *The White Goddess.*

As usual in New York, everything is torn down
Before you have had time to care for it.
Head bowed now, at the shrine of noise, I try to recall
What building stood here. Was there a building at all?
I have lived on this same street for a decade.

Wait. Yes. Vaguely a presence rises
Some five floors high, of shabby stone
—Or am I confusing it with another one
In another part of town, or of the world?—
And over its lintel into focus vaguely
Misted with blood (my eyes are shut)
A single garland sways, stone fruit, stone leaves,
Which years of grit had etched until it thrust
Roots down, even into the poor soil of my seeing.
When did the garland become part of me?
I ask myself, amused almost.
Then shiver once from head to toe,

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Transfixed by a particular cheap engraving of garlands
Bought for a few francs long ago,
All calligraphic tendril and cross-hatched rondure,
Ten years ago, and crumpled up to stanch
Boughs dripping, whose white gestures filled a cab,
And thought of neither then nor since.
Also, to clasp them, the small, red-nailed hand
Of no one I can place. Wait. No. Her name, her features
Lie toppled underneath that year's fashions.
The words she must have spoken, setting her face
To fluttering like a veil, I cannot hear now,
Let alone understand.

So that I am already on the stair,
As it were, of where I lived,
When the whole structure shudders at my tread
And soundlessly collapses, filling
The air with motes of stone.
Onto the still erect building next door
Are pressed levels and hues—
Pocked rose, streaked greens, brown whites.
Wires and pipes, snapped off at the roots, quiver.

Well, that is what life does. I stare
A moment longer, so. And presently
The massive volume of the world
Closes again.

Upon that book I swear
To abide by what it teaches:
Gospels of ugliness and waste,
Of towering voids, of soiled gusts,
Of a shrieking to be faced
Full into, eyes astream with cold—

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With cold?
All right then. With self-knowledge.

Indoors at last, the pages of *Time* are apt
To open, and the illustrated mayor of New York,
Given a glimpse of how and where I work,
To note yet one more house that can be scrapped.

Unwillingly I picture
My walls weathering in the general view.
It is not even as though the new
Buildings did very much for architecture.

Suppose they did. The sickness of our time requires
That these as well be blasted in their prime.
You would think the simple fact of having lasted
Threatened our cities like mysterious fires.

There are certain phrases which to use in a poem
Is like rubbing silver with quicksilver. Bright
But facile, the glamour deadens overnight.
For instance, how 'the sickness of our time'

Enhances, then debases, what I feel.
At my desk I swallow in a glass of water
No longer cordial, scarcely wet, a pill
They had told me not to take until much later.

With the result that back into my imagination
The city glides, like cities seen from the air,
Mere smoke and sparkle to the passenger
Having in mind another destination

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Which is not now that honey-slow descent
Of the Champs-Elysées, her hand in his,
But the dull need to make some kind of house
Out of the life lived, out of the love spent.

James Merrill

THE CLIMB

Where, like a whip, at the foot of the stairs
The banister rail licks round at them,
In a hushed flock they find they are huddled:
The night defunct, in their upturned faces
The party gone out like a light,
And more than one of them open-mouthed
As horses reined up suddenly,

Hearing
Above the blood drumming in their ears
And the crepitant bulb in the dumb house,
Strained banisters creaking like rockers
Where the lurching cripple, drunk as a kite,
Scrapes, thuds, and snuffling half the time
On all fours, hauls himself upwards
On the stairs over their heads,

Like
Some weakness of their own: not to be helped
(Rather turn offensive) and at no time
To be denied—inviting himself
Along with them on the wrong occasion
That way, and soon goatish in his liquor,
Stumbling in boats by the moonlit lake,
Clawing and hugging not to fall—

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Ground out
From under his scuffling and skew stumps,
The racketing music of his ascent
Rains down on their faces, like stones dropped
Into a well, and it will echo,
Discordant, among them long after
They have heard him reach his room finally
And heard the door shut on their shame.

W. S. Merwin

NO ONE

Who would it surprise
If (after the flash, hush, rush,
Thump and crumpling) when the wind of prophecy
Lifts its pitch, and over the drifting ash
At last the trump splits the sky,
No One should arise

(No One just as before:
No limbs, eyes, presence;
Mindless and incorruptible) to inherit
Without question the opening heavens,
To be alone, to be complete,
And so forever?

Who had kept our secrets,
Whose wisdom we had heeded,
Who had stood near us (we proved it) again
And again in the dark, to whom we had prayed
Naturally and most often,
Who had escaped our malice—

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No more than equitable
By No One to be succeeded,
Who had known our merits, had believed
Our lies, before ourselves whom we had considered
And (after ourselves) had loved
Constantly and well.

W. S. Merwin

MYSTIQUE

Quand midi t'allonge à terre . . .—Spire

When noon hurls your body against the ground,
Sweating, your ears buzzing,
In the midst of bees that trample down
Swollen aloes and lavender,
In the midst of ants, resins,
Pine cones, thickening saps, and outspread petals,
And below your feet the ocean
Sleeps in stupor among its reddened rocks—

When noon glues your body against the ground,
In the midst of hunched and muted birds,
Your shirt burning your skin like a blazing lens,
Your throat dry, your mouth parching, your neck
Numbed, your eyes blinded, your brain drained,

Know and behold your God!

Stanley Burnshaw

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PINE

Its fringy needles stiff
As horsehair, glaucous, fine,
Form a kind of leaf;
Each leaf's a smaller branch,
Each branch a smaller tree,
The whole scaled to the inch,
The inch to infinity.
And so pine is what Plato
Might deem the universal
Universal, for
It is that metaphor
With roots in the divine:
The great in the small design.

A pair of winged seeds—
Each like a butterfly
With wings at the vertical,
Folded, at rest—can fly
Out over the world
And haul up in the sun
The bud and bone of pine.
Ecclesiastical,
Beautiful short or tall,
We cut it down. And yet,
Revenge is in its wit:
When we are cased in it,
There's pine to every fit.

Howard Moss

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BALLAD:
BETWEEN THE BOX CARS (1923)

I

I can't even remember the name of the one who fell
Flat on his ass, on the cinders, between the box cars.
I can't even remember whether he got off his yell
Before what happened had happened between the box cars.

But whether or not he managed to get off his yell,
I remember its shape on his mouth, between the box cars,
And it was the shape that yours would be too if you fell
Flat on your ass, on the cinders, between the box cars.

And one other thing I remember perfectly well,
You go for the grip at the front, not the back, of the box cars.
Miss the front, you're knocked off—miss the back, you never
can tell
But you're flat on your ass, on the cinders, between the box cars.

He was fifteen and old enough to know perfectly well
You try for the grip at the front, not the back, of the box cars,
But he was the kind of smart-aleck you always can tell
Will end flat on his ass, on the cinders, between the box cars.

Suppose I remembered his name, then what the hell
Good would it do him now between the box cars?
But it might mean something to me if I could tell
You the name of the one who fell between the box cars.

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II

He was formidable, he was, the little booger,
As he spat in his hands and picked up the Louisville Slugger,
And at that bat-crack
Around those bases he could sure ball the jack,
And if from the outfield the peg had beat him home,
He would slide in slick, and mean as a snigger.
So we dreamed of an afternoon to come,
In the Series, the ninth-inning hush, in the Yankee Stadium,
Sun low, score tied, bases full, two out, and he'd waltz to the plate with his grin—
But no, oh no, not now, not ever! for in
That umpireless rhubarb and brute-heeled hugger-mugger,
He got spiked sliding home, got spiked between the box cars.

Oh, his hair was brown-bright as a chestnut, sun-glinting and curly,
And that lip that smiled boy-sweet could go, of a sudden, mansurly,
And the way he was built
Made the girls in his class in dark stare, and finger the quilt.
Yes, he was the kind you know born to give many delight,
And entering on such life-labor early
Would have moved, bemused in that rhythm and rite,
Through blood-throbbing blackness and moon gleam and pearly thigh-glimmer of night,
To the exquisite glut: *Woman Slays Self For Love,* as the headline would tell.
But no, never now! Like a kid in his first brothel,
In that hot clasp and loveless hurlyburly,
He spilled, as boys may, too soon, between the box cars.

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Oh, he might have been boss of the best super-market in town,
Bright with banners and chrome, where housewives push carts
up and down,
And morning and night
Walked the street with his credit *A*-rated and blood pressure
right,
His boy a dentist in Nashville, his girl at State Normal;
Or a scientist flushed with *Time*-cover renown
For vaccine, or bomb, or smog-removal;
Or a hero with phiz like hewn cedar, though young for the
stars of a general,
Descending the steps to his personal plane to view the home-
town unveiling.
But no, never now!—battle-cunning, the test tube, retailing,
All, all, in a helter-skeltering mish-mash thrown
To that clobber and grind, too soon, between the box cars.

But what is success, or failure, at the last?
The newspaper whirled down the track when the through-
freight has passed
Will sink from that gust
To be of such value as it intrinsically must,
And why should we grieve for the name that boy might have
made
To be printed on paper like that for that blast
To whirl with the wheels' fanfaronade,
When we cannot even remember his name, nor humbly have
prayed
That when that blunt grossness, slam-banging, bang-slamming,
blots black the last blue of sky,
And our own lips utter the crazed organism's cry,
We may know the poor self not alone, but with all who are
cast
To that clobber and slobber and grunt, between the box cars?

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III

He has fled like electricity down the telegraph wires into prairies of distance where the single bird sits small and black against the saffron sky, and is itself.
He has fled like the glitter of glory down the April-wet rails, toward sunset.
He has fled like the wild goose, north-beaked and star-treading, with night-hoot too high to be heard by whoever stands now to brood where the last, lost spur of the Canadian Pacific ends.

*

He has retired into the cold chemical combustion where water at last probes the fibres of the creosote-treated cross ties.
He has retired where the acrid sap of red oak rises under the iron bark, and he does not now scream at the saw-bite.
He has retired into the delectable crystallization of sugar in grape jelly stored twenty years in a cellar, in a Burgundian drowse.

*

He has propounded a theorem the refutation of which would devalue all our anguish.
He has broken past atmospheres where the lungs breathe rarefaction of revelation and the head reels, like Truth.
He has explored a calculus of your unexpected probability, and what now is was never probable, but only is,

*

For we are in the world and nothing is good enough,
Which is to say that the world is here and we are not good enough,
And we live in the world and the world continues to live in us,
Despite all we can do to eject it utterly, including this particular recollection, which now I would eject, reject, but cannot.

Robert Penn Warren

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Elizabeth Hardwick

LIVING IN ITALY: REFLECTIONS ON BERNARD BERENSON

In the rather meek, official narration of the life of Mrs. Jack Gardner, I came across an arresting photograph of Bernard Berenson as a young man, a student at Harvard. Here among the illustrations relating to the subject of the biography (Mr. and Mrs. Gardner with Mr. and Mrs. Zorn in Venice; the Gothic Room at the Gardner Museum, etc.), among the details of ancestry, the accounts of endless journeys and evening parties, of purchases and decisions, courageous endurance and interesting self-indulgence, the passionate, young face of Berenson gazed out serenely, a dreaming animal caught in the dense jungle growth of a rich, lively woman's caprice and accomplishment. This early photograph is a profile, as fine and pleasing as a young girl's; the hair, worn long, curls lightly, falling into layers of waves; there is a perfect, young man's nose, a pure, musing, brown-lashed eye, fortunate long, strong bones of chin and jaw. The collar of the young man's jacket is braided with silk and he looks like an Italian prodigy of the violin, romantically, ideally seen, finely designed, a gifted soul, already suitable to court circles.

We spent the winter of 1950 in Florence and used to go out to see Berenson, as so many had gone before and would go afterward. This unusual man was marvelously vivacious and, in more than one respect, actually inspiring; and yet I would always leave him, somewhat troubled, ungratefully adding and subtracting, unable to come to a decision about him or his life. He was not what I had expected, but I despaired of having an original, fresh or even an honest opinion about him. He was too old, had been viewed and

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consulted far too much; you had a belated feeling you were seeing the matinée of a play that had been running for eight decades. And even the guests staying at his house approached him with caution, fearing to be taken in by an ancient "tourist attraction." Sometimes one of Berenson's guests would take the night off and come to our apartment in Florence where we would drink too much or talk too much and the guest would return to his host, much too late, defiantly clanging the bell to have the gates of the villa opened. When I thought about Berenson, his young profile of sixty-five years before would come back to my memory, mistily mixing with the reality of his famous, white-haired, aged elegance, his spare and poetical look, his assurance and his suppressed turbulence. His turbulence and disorderly emotions were not suppressed, I believed, for psychic hygiene so much as for reasons of practicality, as a waitress would suppress dirty fingernails. In Berenson's beauty there was the refinement, the discipline, the masculinity of a little jockey and some of that profession's mixture of the fiercely driving temperament with the capacity for enjoying a judicious repose. He understood that the proud, small person, believing in art and comfort, must have singular powers and unrelenting watchfulness. Indulgence feminizes; perfection and beauty, without restraint, provoke the unconscious, fatten and soften the will.

At the real beginning of his adult life, Berenson made the profound decision, accepted the necessity for dislocation, and decided to live abroad, in Italy. The fact that Italy was his profession, his art, does not remove the fact of his exile from interest. Ruskin and others pursued the art of Italy without expatriation. It was not a wandering, exiled scholar that Berenson became; he became a sort of foreign prince, a character in a fairy tale with all his properties and drama neatly laid out around him, symbolically ordered. And, indeed, who would dream of severing Berenson and Italy? Where can he be imagined? In Boston? On Fifth Avenue or established on Long Island? He united himself with his residence in the way a nobleman is united with his title and yet, like the nobleman again, it was not altogether convincing as the final existential truth of his life. The depth of the sense of alienation in one so consciously and

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conscientiously placed is a part of the peculiar affliction and, in another sense, one of the privileges of the voluntary exile.

After the war, Italy came into a multitudinous rediscovery and the old exiles who had been shut off from sight and correspondence for a few years came forth too, as old women with their market baskets appear after a siege. With Berenson, post-war prosperity meant an unexpected sweetening of his public image. His possessions, his worldliness, his aestheticism seemed in a frightened, inflationary world, at the least harmless and, at the best, admirably eternal and shrewd. In the depression decade before the war, his villa, *I Tatti,* with its splendid library, its pictures—its Sassetta and Domenico Veneziano—might have been thought exorbitantly self-centered. In 1950, the first thing I thought about it was that it was not luxuriously beautiful, at least not as such places are abroad. It was not a *paradiso* for an interesting idler, but simply a passable Italian villa, serviceable, comfortable, rather staid, with a good many brownish sofas and draperies. True, it had its garden, its dramatic cypresses and pieces of suitable sculpture, indeed everything graceful and practical that might be expected; still it was most memorable for its solidity, the somewhat Northern substantiality, the thickness of stuffs and things, the reminders of the comfortable Beacon Street standards of Berenson's youth. And the house seemed to ask that the occupants and guests conduct themselves in a discreet and plausible manner, keeping the spirit of reasonable calm and well-polished utility. Politeness, adaptability, the habits of social efficiency were strongly stated if not rigidly demanded; they were the firmness upon which a unique personal history rested. A steady pace, familiar and satisfying, reigned benevolently.

There was no Mediterranean slackness about Berenson, no languor or sunstroke or tropical vegetation. On the receptive, hospitable Italian soil, he built an orderly, conscience-driven life. Heaters glowed in the library; curtains were drawn and brown lamps turned on at dusk. At the fireside you might have been listening to the conversations of a character in Thomas Mann, one of those highly individual scholars in *Doctor Faustus,* with their

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passionate convictions, their quirks of taste. In the working household there was a noticeable number of non-Italians: a Scotch chauffeur and steady, fair-faced people gave the air of a punctual and neat reliability. Berenson was an intellectual first and, secondly, a person leading a rich and elaborate social life. No doubt, particularly when he was older, some of his habits and needs were suggested by the successful customs of the comfortable, non-intellectual world. He lived with the silky regularity and pleasurable concentration of energies that are at once opulent and sacrificial—the prudence of the sensual. He knew the grace of the steady rounds, the ritual and faithful observance of a kind of liturgical year with its feasts and fastings, its seasonal pilgrimages to Rome and Venice, the stately moves from the winter at Settignano to the summer in the vale of Vallombrosa. He had his morning privacy for work and his afternoon walks. This constancy, rich people seem to think, keeps the bones oiled, provides activity and change without encouraging the hazards or assaults of the unexpected, the wayfarer's disappointments, the explorer's disillusions. Beautiful things, sweet experiences may, like the sudden fluttering of a butterfly on the window pane, appear without warning, but organization, foresight and routine will prevent sleepless nights and throbbing temples. (In his *Sketch for a Self-Portrait,* Berenson cites the fact of heavy drinking in America as one of his reasons for leaving.) No matter, he was still the host to all the sufferings of an unusual, gifted nature. There is, it seems, always a hole in the wall where the cold wind can enter.

In Italy, looking about, we remembered Dylan Thomas saying after some complaint of ours about America, "You needn't live in that bloody country, America! You could go somewhere else, you know." The possibility of escape never entirely deserts the greedy dreams of the "self-employed." It flares up and dies down, like malaria; it is a disease arrested, not cured; a question without an answer. The thought that one might himself settle far, far away gives a kind of engrossing sub-plot to one's travels. And the Americans who have made the choice, those colonies with their stoves turned high in the winter, provide the occasional, rushing visitor,

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resting at the end of the day in his hotel room, with insolent or jealous thoughts.

A man may exile himself for isolation—Santayana in his convent in Rome— for the freedom of solitude, the purity of the release from useless obligations and conventions; or he may exile himself, from America at least, for the freedom of hospitality, the enlargement of possibilities. You may be a hermit or an inn-keeper. Berenson's nature destined him to be an inn-keeper. Whether he loved humanity or not, he had an enormous appetite for meeting it, being visited by it, for serving it lunch and tea. He seemed helpless before the appeal of a new person, a soul who carried either an accidental or earned distinction. No one was easier to see than Berenson. He could not be called a snob, although his appetite embraced the merely social and the merely rich. When we mailed a letter of introduction to him, he accepted it as a bizarre formality because, of course, he who saw everyone was willing and happy to see yet another. One was never tempted to think it was ennui or triviality that produced this state of addiction; the absorbing inclination seemed to be a simple fear of missing someone, almost as if these countless visitors and travelers had a secret the exile pitifully wished to discover. The expatriate sometimes suffers painfully from the dread of losing touch with the world he has left but towards which he looks back with longings and significant emotions, with guilt and resentment, with all the tart ambivalence of the injured lover. It is, after all, the fickle, abandoned country for which the exile writes his books, for which his possessions are ultimately designated; money and citizenship, nieces and nephews, language and memory—the very skin of life—remain in their old place.

As the years pass, the feelings of loss and uncertainty appear to grow stronger not weaker for those who live abroad. The traveler from home is important, the visitor, the acquaintance passing through bring knowledge, prejudices, fashions that cannot be acquired from the newspapers. A feeling of guilt persists about the very beauty of life abroad, the greater ease, and above all the parasitism of the exile's condition. The dream-like timelessness of Italy

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is a captivity into which uneasiness creeps. Americans who removed themselves to England were usually seeking manners, civilization, congenial spirits; in Italy the senses were enchanted, brought under the spell of the great sun, the heart-breaking landscape, the sweetness of peasant faces, toiling and enduring, the lemon tree against the wall. It appears that an American cannot become an Italian—property, marriage to the aristocracy, nothing seems to insure assimilation. And the answer must be that Americans want to live in Italy but do not wish to become Italians. Many once wished to become Englishmen and succeeded; foreigners from every land have become Frenchmen of a sort. The Italian exile, with his nostalgic, feudal temperament, is also a person with a wound, not so very different in his feelings from those beachcombers and divorcees in the Caribbean, all who seek to soothe their hurt spirits with the sun, with flowering winters, with white houses opened to the new air and entangled with old vines. Everywhere in Italy, among the American colony, one's envy is cut short time and time again by a sudden feeling of sadness in the air, as of something still alive with the joys of an Italian day and yet somehow faintly withered, languishing. Unhappiness, disappointment support the exile in his choice. Even the endlessly productive Santayana revealed at times his wounds from America and Harvard. Of his career at Harvard he wrote dryly, that it had been "slow and insecure, made in an atmosphere of mingled favour and distrust." He pretended not to care. He made very little use of Italy; it was a refuge in which he wrote his books, tirelessly.

Was Berenson shady, crooked? Did he make his fortune with the help of willfully false as well as genuine attributions? Whatever the truth, certainly large numbers of his critics and his admirers accepted the charge of profitable dishonesties back in his past. By choosing to use his knowledge for the sale of works of art he brought himself under the suspicion of financial immorality. The "attribution" of venality clung to this famous humanist. Old scandal, dubious gains, lingering doubts, gave a drama and tension to his life; but his work, his books were authentic and he was, himself, a pure creation—that everyone agreed. Berenson lamented that his

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fame as an art expert "degenerated into a widespread belief that if only I could be approached in the right way I could order this or that American millionaire to pay thousands upon thousands and to attribute to a great master. Proposals of this nature . . . became a burden; and in the end I was compelled in self-defence to refuse hundreds of thousands for any daub that I was bribed by the seller to see people unless I was sure that they brought no 'great masters' with them. Needless to say that every person I would not receive, every owner whose picture I would not ascribe to Raphael or Michaelangelo or Giorgione, Titian or Tintoretto . . . turned into an enemy."

Berenson's success, the money he made as a young man, aroused supersitious twitchings among people everywhere, even those who delighted in him as a friend, and certainly among his colleagues. Hadn't life turned out to be too easy for this poor Jewish fine arts scholar from Boston? Was knowledge, honestly used, ever quite so profitable, especially knowledge of art? He had, it was felt, sold himself to the devil by demanding life on his own terms, by asking more than other scholars, by becoming a *padrone* instead of a simple professor. Italian critics were far from hospitable to his ideas and great feuds raged. They did not give over their art to a foreigner without a fight, without accusations and sneers.

Some of the uneasiness felt by the world will inevitably be felt by the man himself. Stubbornness of attitude became a defense for a whole life. A hardening and narrowing, repetition of positions taken long ago, obstinate rejections disguised pain and fear of obsolescence. In Italy, the tremendousness of the past reinforces the spirit in its old assumptions; nothing new seems to be required. It was part of Berenson's idyllic removal that he couldn't like much of the art of his own time. The gods will not grant every gift. He set himself against violence, fragmentation, improvisation, primitivism. He couldn't accept Picasso, Stravinsky, T. S. Eliot, Kafka. He was apprehensive about these productions, irked by the broken forms. He liked Homer, Goethe and Proust, but Faulkner disposed him to fretfulness. He looked upon so many contemporary things with painful distaste and something like hurt feelings. He seemed

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to see his own essence threatened with devastation. For him, the agile will, the effort to maintain security and preserve courage had been everything. Hesitation, nihilism, abstraction appalled this pulsing ego that had sought to define in his work and personal existence a compact, ennobling, classical example. It was odd that in the lighter arts, in living personalities, he was extremely in-the-know, open to feeling, to humor, to affection, to wild originality.

Pride and conscience urged Berenson to the gritting work of writing. His style was clear and sensible, but literally brought forth in sorrow because he hadn't the luck of ready eloquence, except in conversation. Santayana's contented industry puzzled him. "He loved writing! Preferred it to reading and talking. Imagine such a man!" Still, write Berenson did, and some of the vices and temptations of the literary character were his as much as if he had been living in New York, producing regularly for the art publications. He gave hints of jealousy and of thinking himself under-valued. He was inclined at times to composition on topics that did not deeply engage him, but which he felt necessary to undertake because of wishing to keep in step with subtle changes in taste and emphasis. I once heard another art critic cry out in pain, "That wicked B. B.! He would never have thought of writing a book on Caravaggio if he hadn't known I was doing one!" Berenson noted with chagrin the fee Sir Kenneth Clark was reported to be receiving for his lectures on the nude in the National Gallery in Washington. (The older critic had lived a longer life than most are granted well before the age of plushy lectures, easy endowments, fabulous stipends.) His disappointments were only reality, his firm sense of things as they were in life. A deeper truth of his nature was caught in odd moments—I remember seeing him, ancient, regal, stepping along nimbly, like a little gnome king, on the arm of the dancer, Katherine Dunham.

The great age Berenson achieved did not strike one as an accident, a stroke of fine heredity or luck; longevity was an achievement, the same as his books, bought with a good deal of anguish and hard work. His nature, with its prudence, its routine, its rich mixture of work and pleasure, like a private stock tobacco, seemed to have been designed for long use. We happened to be paying a

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call on him in Rome, where he was installed for his yearly state visit like Queen Victoria on her business-like holidays, when the news came that Croce had died. "I should have gone first! The dear man was younger than I!" Berenson said with feeling. Everyone smiled. It was not only that Berenson had lived so long but his wanting to go on living still longer that annoyed certain people. Age was another of his slightly disreputable luxuries.

When he died, at ninety-four, he left, besides his books and the pleasure he had given people, a peculiar monument. He left his villa, his library, to Harvard, the home of his lost youth, so that gifted young Americans, interested in art and history, might look out on the Tuscan landscape and be saved from barbarism and provinciality. Berenson seemed to want to leave his very daily existence to America, his setting, his chosen life. Like all his gifts to the world, this too was received with misgivings and hesitation. Did he have enough money to make such a gift? Before she could be accepted the gift must have a dowry, money for her own upkeep, as if she were a bride. "We will all starve! For Harvard!" they used to say in his household. The arrangements were made and the site created by sheer force of personal will and longing would be returned to its source, to be preserved as a little pocket of American intellectual industry, a bit of foreign investment, in the busy Appennines. What endurance and genius had kept alive would go along smoothly, buzzing like the lawn mowers in front of the White House, with the efficient routine of public domesticity. Institutionalized, the villa would soon remind one of those inns taken over by a conquering army. Its occupants will have been chosen and assigned. All those hundreds upon hundreds of guests of the past—the surly writers and old ladies from Boston, the dons, the pansies, the actresses, the historians—won't be coming back to gossip, in a whisper in the halls, about how fortunes were made, to sneak into Florence to get drunk at the Excelsior, and to see the unique Berenson, leading his curious life. At the end, the Pope sent his blessing.

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Richard Wollheim

ORWELL RECONSIDERED

The reissue of a book twenty-odd years after its original appearance makes some of the conventions and courtesies of reviewing superfluous. Once it has come of age a book should be judged by the standards of history. Judged by these standards *The Road to Wigan Pier* is undoubtedly a piece of out-of-date journalism. Let us consider each of these charges separately.

The charge of journalism is one made freely in general criticism, and we should make an effort to use it sparingly and with precision. What makes *The Road to Wigan Pier* a piece of journalism isn't its content, nor the urgency with which it is written, nor even exactly its style. It is, rather, the particular attitude that the author adopts toward his subject matter. Whether he is writing about the condition of the working classes in the 1930's (as in the first part of the book) or about the predicament of socialism and socialists (as in the second part), his method is the same. In each case, what he does is to pick out from the material at his disposal a number of details all of them as startling, as shocking, as arresting as possible, and then to set them down in a style that is very deliberately and very self-consciously none of these things. The method is undoubtedly effective. One would have to be very thick-skinned indeed not to be deeply discomforted by *The Road to Wigan Pier*. But the method has also its defects, and the most important of these is that it tends to distortion. Such a tendency is most evident in the second or argumentative part of the book where Orwell in his desire to make every point count for one, succeeds often enough in completely obliterating the lines of the discussion. One feels that a

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man could not be so interested in stressing the persuasive or emotive elements in a thesis unless he believed in it; and then it turns out that Orwell doesn't. But it would be uncharitable to dwell too long on Orwell's defects as a theoretical writer. For he in this matter is the chief loser: even now it seems as likely as not that he will be remembered for ideas that, even if he did propound them at some length and with some vehemence, certainly aren't his. But this same passion for the striking and strident detail, for anything that catches the eye or plays on the nerves, is also Orwell's undoing as a descriptive writer. There is much in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that must be amongst the ineradicably painful memories of any sensitive reader: the inferno of the miners at the hour when the "fillers" are working the coal face; the old age pensioners driven from their homes by the means tests and dying wretchedly in lodging-houses; the newspaper canvassers keeping down their miserable jobs until they are worn out by the helplessness of the work; the Brookers' tripe shop, and the beetles, and Mrs. Brooker wiping her greasy mouth on strips of newspaper. But the accumulation of these sharp, stabbing pictures doesn't seem to add up to a vision of the whole: what we are left with is a series of stills, mostly "close-ups," which no one has animated. We learn from Orwell a great deal about what, twenty-three years ago in Wigan or Sheffield, one would have seen, or heard, or smelt, but what one gets singularly little idea of is what it would have been like to have lived there.

Now I know that this—particularly this last sentence—sounds like the usual kind of "literary criticism" that is bestowed in a bland way on any genuine work of social protest. Moreover in this case it isn't exactly criticism. For is it not part of Orwell's own thesis that in a modern industrial society it is quite impossible for one half of the community, even with the best will in the world, to arrive at anything like a proper understanding of how "the other half" lives? This has nothing to do with class-warfare or class hatred: it is simply a matter of class-*difference*. The two "halves" live in such entirely different ways that language cannot bring them together. It is as if there were certain things in life which are so important in themselves and so far-reaching in their consequences

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that if one doesn't know them directly, by acquaintance, one is never going to obtain knowledge of them by description.

And yet I think there is something in Orwell's style or manner that does exacerbate this problem for him, and it is what I have called his journalism. To see what I mean, you have only to compare *The Road to Wigan Pier* with another book about modern poverty: Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Levi also has taken for his subject people who simply by virtue of the physical conditions of their existence have placed themselves beyond the understanding of the educated. Indeed of the two those about whom Levi writes are poorer, more backward, more isolated from and ignorant of modern concerns and interests, and yet I think that at the end of his book one knows—I don't just mean that one has the *feeling* or *sensation* of knowing, but that one actually *knows*—more about the half-starved superstitious peasants of Lucania than one does after reading Orwell about the unemployed of Wigan. And the reason for this is, quite simply, that whereas one book is a work of journalism, the other is a work of literature: not high literature perhaps, but literature.

From the very beginning the difference is evident. Levi starts from a position that is somewhat back from his subject, and it is only slowly, gradually that he works his way towards, and then into, it: all the while bringing his reader with him, neither dragging behind him nor rushing ahead. Where Orwell is knowing, Levi is informative. He takes nothing for granted: he even tells one on the first page of the book what the word "*christiano*" means in the usage of the uneducated, which is something that an alert tourist to Italy can pick up for himself. But when he explains something, he does so as, one feels, the peasants he is writing about would if they could: when, for instance, he recounts the strange beliefs that the peasants hold about wolves and gnomes, it is only external evidence that tells one that these beliefs aren't also his. On the other hand, when Orwell tells one something about what his working-class people think or feel—and it is amazing how rarely he refers to anything except the physical terms of their life—he does so in a way that is striking but *external*: he reminds one force-

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fully that it is a necessary truth that one can only ever see the surface of things.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two writers is that Orwell subscribes to, and is guilty of, the great fallacy of naturalism: the belief that the essence of the things in time can be conveyed by reference to the transient and the ephemeral. It is easy enough to believe this. It is easy enough to think that if you mention the P.A.C. and Worcester sauce and Carnera and lounge lizards, then you have forever conveyed the feel of 1936. It is easy enough to think this when you write it, and easy enough to go on thinking it when a few months later you read the proofs of what you have written. It is only the reader reading it twenty years later who has his doubts, and twenty years further on those doubts are confirmed when the book is read either by people with "special interest" in the period or by no one at all. Perhaps Orwell would have thought that this didn't matter: perhaps he would have thought that he wrote in the first place for his own contemporaries, and that if by any chance someone at a later date wanted to read him, so much the better, but this wasn't in the calculation. Orwell, I say, might have thought this, but I doubt if in all honesty he did. Because I think that ever since the concept of literature was invented, these have not been the thoughts of writers.

The matter may be put like this: Orwell, I suggested, addresses himself primarily to the eye and the nerves. It is this that marks him out as a journalist, and good or honest journalists are distinguished from bad or dishonest journalists by the fact that they would not pretend to be appealing elsewhere. The limitation of the method is that two areas of the human constitution toward which literature is traditionally directed are ignored: the head and the heart. By contrast *Christ Stopped at Eboli* in its quiet, gentle, unpretentious way never leaves either of these two areas untaxed or unaddressed for long. That is what makes it a moving book: while *The Road to Wigan Pier* is at its best a maddening one: a book to send one mad with rage and indignation and shame.

And that of course is its aim. Orwell in writing *The Road to Wigan Pier* was writing a polemical book whatever else he was also

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writing. He wanted to draw people's attention to the conditions of the day: and he felt that it was urgently necessary to do this, not just because of the conditions themselves, but because of a further belief he entertained with great conviction about the immediate future of the world. This belief was in fact false and the conditions to which Orwell wanted to draw attention are no longer what they were. And this is why I describe *The Road to Wigan Pier* as not just journalism but also out-of-date journalism.

The belief in the light of which Orwell reviewed the state of England was that there were two and only two possible political futures for the world: Socialism and Fascism. There was perhaps a great deal in the contemporary scene that obscured and complicated the picture and prevented one from seeing this simple fact: but soon enough the fog of ideology and party would clear and it would become evident beyond all doubt that in the coming struggle for power there were only two entrants. Today this certainly is not the case. Whether it was ever reasonable to think this is another matter. Nor should it concern us much, for it seems to have been a peculiar feature of the 1930's that the rationality of a man's political prognostications varied inversely with his intelligence—*vide* supremely Keynes' interpretation of the Munich Settlement in the *New Statesman*. Anyhow it is quite clear that the future is not for us as Orwell envisaged it.

Nor are the conditions of England on which he rested his gaze recognizably the same. In Orwell's England there were two million unemployed: In June 1958 there were 472,000—and 1958 was, of course, a bad year compared with 1957 and 1956 when there were 297,000 and 250,000 respectively. In Orwell's England a man on public assistance drew (roughly) 12/6 for himself, another 12/6 for his wife, 4/– for his oldest child and 3/– for any other child: so that an average family subsisting on the dole had about 30/– on which to live. Today a man gets 53/– for himself, another 30/– for his wife, 15/– for his eldest child and 7/– for any other child: in addition he gets 8/– family allowance for any child (except the first) who is still at school, so that the father of a family has an income of about £5-10-0. Against this we must offset a rise in the standard of living of about 200%, but this still means an appreciable increase

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in real terms: i.e., £5-10-0 as against an equivalent of £4-10-0, or a rise of 20%. Again Orwell concentrated a great deal on conditions in the coal mines, and here of course the changes have been more spectacular. The average earnings per shift for all mineworkers is given by Orwell as 9/1¾d: in 1957 it was 57/2d—a rise even in real terms of over 100%. The average earnings of a miner per week in Orwell's England was £2-2-0: the comparable figure for 1957 is £14-10-4d—a rise of about 130%. Along with this increase in wages there has gone a no less remarkable improvement in welfare, in the social and industrial conditions of the miner. The fatal accident rate, for instance, on which Orwell lays considerable stress has halved between then and now. The truth is that the mining industry from being one of the most backward and poverty-stricken areas of the national economy has become, in what is perhaps its ultimate phase, one of the most prosperous and progressive.

This is not to say that in the England of today, in the British Welfare State, hardship and misery are unknown. There is a great deal of both. But neither is to be found where Orwell found them; in location, and perhaps even more in character, they have changed. The poverty of today is "secondary" rather than "primary"; it affects the old and the sick, the neglected and the improvident, the lame ducks of the class-system and not, as in Orwell's day, the centrally-placed members of one specific class. And though inequality is as much a feature of our England as of his, the whole structure of inequality has been shifted upwards, *en bloc* as it were, so that today its evil effects are not recognizably what they were, being cultural and psychological rather than anything material in the crude sense. The evils of contemporary Britain are not those of insufficiency but of injustice; and though Orwell talked of injustice, what he was really interested in doing was to point out to those who had enough to eat that there were others living not a hundred miles away who hadn't. And yet it must be said in all fairness to Orwell that the kind of remedy we need for our ills did not fall outside his imaginative grasp.

The Road to Wigan Pier is then a piece of out-of-date journalism. It is, if I am not wrong, out-of-date and it is journalism.

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But is it anything else as well? In answering this question I want to avoid a larger question that enjoys a certain vogue in England at the moment and in which it would be only too easy to get immersed: that is, Orwell as a case. This larger question arises from considering all of Orwell's books together, the books he wrote against the future as well as those he wrote against the present, both *Animal Farm* and *1984,* on the one hand, and *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier,* on the other hand, and then asking whether the earlier books lead on to the later books and where the later books lead, if, that is, they lead anywhere at all.

But whatever we make of the larger question I am certain what answer we should give to the narrower question. Of course *The Road to Wigan Pier* is more than its defects. More specifically, its merit resides in the question that it raises and round which, in its fluid way, the book is centered. The answers that Orwell gives to his question are seldom interesting and sometimes downright silly. Even at his best Orwell suffered from two failings which stood in the way of his being much of a thinker; he was too argumentative, and he was too forgetful. Too argumentative, in that when he could not make up his mind on the merits of an issue he preferred to take both sides, each against the other. Too forgetful, in that he often seems to have been quite unable to remember on one page what he wrote on another. But, as I say, the merit of *The Road to Wigan Pier,* what saves it from the scrap heap, is the question that it poses; and that question might be rendered as, What is it really to be a Socialist?

Now it is nowadays held to be one sign of philosophical naïveté to ask questions of the form, What is a real *x?* or What is it really to be an *x?* For, the argument runs, any such form of words serves to conflate, and hence to confuse, two very different issues that might be raised. One is the verbal, often trivial issue, What is the meaning, or definition, of *x*? and the other is the normative or ethical question, which can be formulated more satisfactorily as, What ought an *x* to be like? or, What is a good *x?* Now these two question, the verbal and the ethical, are evidently differ-

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ent, and if proof is required of this it lies in the fact that no answer to a question of the first kind could be an answer to a question of the second kind. For if it could be, then it would be possible to rule out *by definition* the possibility of an *x*'s being what it oughtn't to be, or, more simply, of a bad *x*: which is an evident absurdity.

Now it is no part of my case to defend Orwell from a charge of philosophical naïveté. But, after all, it is I, not Orwell, who formulated the question in this seemingly objectionable way, and since I have argued that the case for *The Road to Wigan Pier* hangs on this question, it is undeniably my task to explain what I understand by it.

We might put it like this: A certain number of people (perhaps ourselves included) are in the habit of describing themselves as socialists. At elections there is every reason to believe that they vote for a Socialist candidate or the nearest thing they can find. The question now arises, over and above voting Socialist—and, of course saying that they are socialists—what makes them socialists? Or are these two things enough? Do they by themselves constitute a belief in socialism? If they do, then a belief in socialism seems to be, in the first place, something easy to come by, and, secondly, curiously unconnected with the great practical problems to which socialism is supposed to relate. But, then, if these things do not constitute a belief in socialism, what more is required?

The question is a salutary one. As the barest minimum it must have the following effect on anyone who considers it at all seriously: that either he will require more of someone before he regards him as a socialist, or he will attach rather less weight to the assignment of political belief. It was characteristic of the 'thirties, at any rate in England, that they at one and the same time distributed political labels (both honorific and pejorative) with greater liberality than had traditionally been the case, and also set greater store by these labels. Orwell was, if anyone ever was, a child of his age, but in posing what I have called the central problem of *The Road to Wigan Pier* he provided a solvent for some of the worst superstitions of his contemporaries.

Orwell's concern is, then, not so much with socialism as with

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Belief. The first question a socialist must ask himself is: If I believe in *socialism,* what is it that I believe in? And there must be few socialists who don't ask themselves this question. But the second question that a socialist should ask himself is one that I suspect very few socialists do. It is: If I *believe in* socialism, how do I stand to socialism? And that is Orwell's question. What made him raise it?

In *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell describes his own road to socialism, and I think that if we consider this more closely we shall find our answer. When Orwell left Eton—a word he won't quite mention—he joined the Indian Imperial Police and went to Burma. He was there for five years, administering a rule that he gradually came to feel was absolutely unjustifiable. It was, in his eyes, quite simply a system of oppression, and by helping to sustain it he himself was an oppressor. When he came back to England on leave in 1927, he could bear it no longer: he threw up his job and never went back. "I was not going back to be a part of that evil despotism" is how he puts it. But once back in England he could not feel free of the charge of being an oppressor. For the working classes of England, it now occurred to him, were just as much victims of injustice as the unfortunate Burmese. Indeed the system of oppression in Britain of one class over another seemed, if anything, worse because harsher and less tempered with mercy than the more publicized system that existed outside Britain of one country over another. The question then arose for Orwell, How could he contract out of the second system as he had out of the first? What in the case of capitalism was the analogue of leaving the Indian Imperial Police? The obvious answer was socialism. But what did socialism involve? If it was no more than a theoretical belief, then to embrace socialism was the exact counterpart of declaring oneself to be a little Englander and staying on in the Indian Imperial Police. Surely there must be something more—and this, of course, is how the central problem of *The Road to Wigan Pier* came to assert itself.

The "sensible" answer to Orwell's question is, I suppose, that there is no analogue to leaving the Indian Imperial Police. There is no single action or set of actions that counts as contracting out of

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the capitalist system. Of course there may be at different times different things one can do—but there is, as it were, no standing action for someone who rejects capitalism. And that is because capitalism is a pervasive system in a way which imperialism isn't. In part the point is a purely formal one: it derives from the fact that we call everything in a capitalist system "capitalism" though a great deal of it may be quite unconnected with the undesirable aspects of the system and indeed would probably be exactly as it is under any system. In part the point is not formal: in a capitalist society the institutions of capitalism are strategically placed and they contrive in varying degrees to color and affect most of what happens throughout the society. But however we look at the problem, the answer is the same. There is no way of washing one's hands of capitalism. And by this I don't just mean that one person's contracting out of the system isn't going to make such a difference or isn't going to bring the system to an end. I mean that there is no method of contracting out of the system. The person who rejects capitalism is in a position closer to that of the pacificist than to that of the vegetarian.

Of course there will always be people who won't accept the "sensible" answer. Even if one can't get outside the system, they argue, one can at any rate work oneself very close to the periphery, and it is too convenient and easygoing an answer to say that because one can't hope for total success, therefore one shouldn't try at all. The thing is like a stain: one may not be able to remove it, but one can at least get it paler.

Certainly this is what Orwell felt, and it would be hard—particularly for anyone who has no intention of following him—not to admire him for it. What he proved to himself, and proved for the benefit of anyone who cares to learn, is that a great deal of what is clung to in bourgeois life, is clung to not on account of the pleasure it gives but out of the fear of giving it up. The pleasures of the rich should occupy a place of respect in the thoughts of any genuine reformer: if only for the good utilitarian reason that the rich get pleasure from them. But the so-called "pleasures" of the rich from which none get pleasure and for the sake of which many suffer,

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deserve no mercy from anyone; and it is one of the great merits of a modern Thoreau like Orwell that he shows these things up for what they are.

It is, then, impossible not to admire Orwell for his attempt to detach himself from bourgeois life and to effect a total immersion in the life of the working-classes. As an act of renunciation and penance it has a heroic quality; it sets him aside as one kind of superior person, the kind that does things that others can't get themselves to do. But there comes a point in Orwell's writing when the act ceases to have a purely personal or even penitential character, and the life of the working-classes is presented not just as a life we should all know about nor as the only life a free man can lead, but as a definitely superior condition, as a form of existence that, quite apart from considerations of curiosity or conscience, it would be reasonable to prefer to anything else that modern life has to offer:

> Curiously enough it is *not* the triumphs of modern engineering, nor the radio, nor the cinematograph, nor the five thousand novels which are published yearly, nor the crowds at Ascot and the Eton and Harrow match, but the memory of working-class interiors—especially as I saw them in my childhood before the war, when England was still prosperous—that reminds me that our age has not been altogether a bad one to live in.

The passage taken as a whole seems to me to be as good an example as one could find of the sort of slovenly emotive writing that in other quarters Orwell thought it his duty to scourge. Why, for instance, does he suppose that the aspects of life he opposes to working-class life are the only other candidates for excellence? Or why does he suggest that those who support middle-class culture do so on account of any of these things? Still, Orwell's championship of proletarian culture, stripped of its false rhetoric, is of considerable interest; not least because of its parallelism with a cultural movement in English thought today.

The most notable feature of Orwell's case is that he produces no coherent evidence in its favor. On the contrary everything he says in the ordinary course of description about working-class life

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seems designed to turn one against it. It may make people—at any rate those with strong enough defenses—kinder, gentler, nicer, but only in the way in which being adrift on a raft is supposed to bring out the best in people: because of its awfulness. Just before the passage I have quoted, Orwell attempts some sort of eulogy of working-class family life, but in doing so it is noticeable that he falls into the crudest kind of sentimentality:

> Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair on one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat—it is a good place to be in. . .

And when Orwell pulls himself out of sentimentality, it is only to take refuge in a preciosity that is no less disagreeable: the scene described above he praises as exemplifying "the perfect symmetry as it were of a working class family at its best."

The other point about Orwell's championship of proletarian culture is the difficulty of reconciling it with his socialism. For if working class culture is all that superior, it is hard to see why it ought not to be retained: yet, equally, it is hard to see how it can be retained, if one abolishes the material conditions on which it must to some extent at least depend. Orwell—who was never a man to pass over situations that were awkward for his views, though he did not always see their full implications—deals with this problem when he considers the rehousing of some of the slum inhabitants of Wigan. The rehousing Orwell regarded as a monstrosity: it was "ruthless and soulless." The new inhabitants had been taken out of their old homes, removed from their friends, their shops, their pub, and put down in a bleak inhospitable estate, miles from where they worked, with no centre of social life, where they weren't even allowed to do many of the things they most wanted to, such as keeping pigeons. Of course Orwell admits in the end that the change *is* a change for the better, but by now it is obscure to see how it can be so on his view of the matter. Nowadays, as I mentioned earlier, there is a school of thought that tries to combine

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anew Orwell's political and cultural predilections. The most persuasive, in any case the most poignant, expression of this point of view is in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy,* and it finds a recurrent echo in the lively pages of *The University and Left Review.* If this school of thought is ever to progress beyond a kind of antiquarianism, it must try to resolve what looks like an inherent paradox in its thinking. For traditionally nearly all socialism, indeed nearly all reformism, accepts to some extent at least a theory of the dependence of cultural on material conditions: it is difficult to see where it would draw its inspiration from if it totally abandoned any such conception. And yet if it does adhere to such a conception, it is hard to see how it can envisage and advocate as the working-class future thorough-going reform in the material field along with total conservatism in the field of culture. The workers, it seems to suggest, have only their chains to lose: for everything that goes with their chains they must preserve.

It is no part of my case to suggest that a critic of working-class conditions ought to believe in the superiority of bourgeois culture, or that it is unreasonable to feel concern about the extent to which socialism in practice has come to mean the progressive assimilation of the more intelligent members of the working class into the middle class. My real point is that it is unnecessary for a socialist to have any very strong or precise views about the kind of culture that a socialist society should incorporate: and not merely unnecessary but unwise. A common argument used by thinkers of a reactionary kind is that a certain earlier period of history, say the Middle Ages, was not inferior to the present because the people who lived then were not evidently or articulately discontented with their circumstances. To this argument the evident retort is that they weren't discontented because they didn't know better: whereas people who live nowadays and have some knowledge of both forms of culture wouldn't revert. The principle of the argument is this: that cultural preferences are of interest only if they are expressed between cultures both of which are known or familiar. And the principle has relevance for those interested in the future of society. With what right do we try to impose upon some yet unborn society

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some existing form of culture when most likely a new form will arrive of its own accord which may well be preferable to anything we can envisage? The proper field for "reformism" is material conditions, for here the consequences of any move we make are more or less ascertainable and their desirability or otherwise a suitable matter for the informed moral judgment.

To Orwell such an attitude was repugnant. "To take a rational political decision," he was to write in his essay on Koestler, "one must have a picture of the future." Of course to some extent one must: but not, I maintain, a picture possessed of that degree of detail which Orwell thought necessary. And I think that he pitched his demands so high for two reasons neither of which is valid. In the first place, as we have seen, he believed that the only *practical* political alternative to socialism was fascism, and fascism had a picture of the future, and therefore if one wanted to beat fascism one must have a bigger and brighter picture. In other words, Orwell anticipated an argument of which, *mutatis mutandis,* we have heard enough and more than enough during the Cold War. The other reason why Orwell thought that socialism required a complete vision of the end towards which it was directed is, I suspect, that fundamentally he believed in conformity. To some the appeal of socialism resides in the fact that it holds out the prospect of a society, to be realized at some not too distant date in the future, in which men, all of them, will be free to lead the life they choose. Without in any way rejecting this ideal of autonomy Orwell makes it fairly clear that for him the attractions of socialism are not derivative from it. What he looked for in socialism was the inauguration of a certain determinate way of life: a "decent" way of life—to use a favorite expression of his. It is true that Orwell gives as one of the "essential aims" of socialism *liberty*—the other one being *justice*—but to Orwell (who here as elsewhere has so much in common with Rousseau) liberty meant not the ability to lead whatever kind of life one might choose, but rather a particular quality, or characteristic, pertaining to the kind of life he expected everyone to choose. Liberty in Orwell's scheme of things finds its natural contrast in servility rather than in constraint. It would be no great var-

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ody of Orwell to say that for him a free society was a society in which no man touched his cap to another. Yet it is quite clear that in such a society, a society of hard, proud, self-reliant, manly men, there could be a terrible absence of liberty as we ordinarily think of it. What Orwell hated were things like bureaucracy and pomp and Five Year Plans and restrictions and propaganda: these things he thought, and rightly thought, incompatible with liberty. But what he seems also to have hated is crankiness, affectation, perversion, "softness," aestheticism: and I don't think that he would have regarded it as any great breach of liberty to crowd these things out of society—not to suppress them, mind you, but to crowd them out, to sweep them under the carpet. And there I'm sure he was wrong.

But I do not want to end on a note of criticism. The limitations of *The Road to Wigan Pier* are very much the limitations of the age. The book was written, we must remember, in an epoch when it was held that all literature should aspire to the condition of journalism. And it must be said in Orwell's favor that out of this dusty program he managed to snatch a success well beyond the reach of any of his English contemporaries. One has only to compare *The Road to Wigan Pier* with another typical product of the age with which it has marked affinities—Grierson's documentary films—to be struck by the direct and humane and unpretentious nature of Orwell's writing. And in one passage, at least, the book transcends the limitations that the author imposed upon it: sincerity, passion and observation suddenly combine to produce a fragment of true literature. Orwell is leaving Wigan. He looks out of the train, and as we listen to his description of the scene, we hear, unexpectedly (but all the more moving for that), the note of true poetry: the elegiac poetry of the modern city, the poetry created by Baudelaire and the Goncourts, and transplanted and refashioned by the young Joyce:

> This was March, but the weather had been horribly cold and everywhere there were mounds of blackened snow. As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the embankment. At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the

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stones, poking a stick up the leaden wastepipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her—her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is 25 and looks 40, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that "It isn't the same for *them as it would be for us*," and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her—understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drainpipe.

We are saddened by the death of

ALBERT CAMUS

1913-1960

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Max Hayward

SOVIET LITERATURE IN THE DOLDRUMS

In February of this year the French journal *Esprit* published an anonymous essay by a young Soviet writer on the topic of socialist realism, a brilliant and original effort to explain the stagnation of Soviet literature. Early in his discussion the writer observes:

> Art does not fear dictatorship nor severity, nor repressions, nor even conservatism and clichés. If needs be, art is narrowly religious, stupidly *étatiste,* without individuality, and yet it is great. We are enthusiastic about the style of ancient Egypt, Russian iconography, folklore. Art is fluid enough to fit the Procrustean bed imposed by history. There is only one thing that it cannot tolerate: eclecticism.

The author points out that in a "theological" society where everything is subordinated to the achievement of a supreme Purpose, it is incongruous to employ modes of expression adequate only to lack of faith, skepticism and self-deprecating irony. A "religious esthetic" cannot be based on nineteenth-century models. Yet this is precisely what is demanded of Soviet writers. Ever since Gorky commanded them to "learn from the classics" they have been trying to glorify the "positive hero" and his devoted, single-minded struggle for communism in the style of Balzac, Tolstoy, de Maupassant and Chekhov. There is, then, a patent contradiction between form and content. Positive heroes and militant optimism cannot be convincingly portrayed in language associated with the "superfluous man" and deeply pessimistic uncertainty about the purpose of life. Thus, says the author:

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If many writers are going through a crisis at the moment . . . it is because they have to seek a compromise and unite what cannot be united: the positive hero who logically lends himself to schematized, allegorical treatment—with psychological character-study; an elevated, declamatory style—with description of prosaic, everyday life; a sublime ideal—with verisimilitude to reality. This results in a monstrous salad. The characters [of Soviet fiction] torment themselves almost à la Dostoevsky, grow sad almost à la Chekhov, arrange their family life almost à la Tolstoy and yet at the same time vie with each other in shouting platitudes from the Soviet press: "Long live peace in the whole world," "Down with the warmongers." This is neither classicism nor realism. It is semi-classical demi-art of a none too socialist demi-realism.

In the author's view the only Soviet writer who has ever given original artistic expression to the Soviet epoch was Mayakovsky. He hated analysis and psychologism. He never described everyday life (*byt*) or nature. He did not try to imitate the Russian classics, but devised a hyperbolic, homeric style of his own. Since his day Soviet writers have been condemned to a ludricrous eclectric epigonism, including, if they are poets, even elements of Mayakovsky. This eclectism was imposed in the 1930's and was in line with other extraordinary miscegenated forms (*e.g.*, the combination of one-man rule with a "democratic" constitution) invented by Stalin.

The greatest source of contradiction and tension in Soviet intellectual life since the famous 20th Congress of 1956 is that these ideological hybrids have not been allowed to lapse with the partial eclipse of their maker.

Free Content vs. Free Form

Students of communism have tended to ascribe all the ills of Soviet literature and art to the principle of "partiinost" (*i.e.*, conformity to party guidance) with special emphasis on the restrictions that this places on *what* the writer says. As the author of the *Esprit* articles suggests, however, perhaps an even greater handicap for the Soviet writer is the fact that party doctrine prevents him from freely elaborating an original style. Freedom to express certain ideas is less important in art than freedom in the choice of form. It is only this latter freedom that is essential to art.

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It is odd that the more imaginative post-Stalin leadership has not realized that by granting this freedom it might win much more effective support from the writers as propagandists for the Cause (at least from those of them who still have not lost faith in it) and at the same time deflect them from their interest in the extension of more general freedoms. Since the events of 1956, this has been understood by the party leadership in Poland and even in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where considerable discretion is allowed the writers in their choice of style. Thus, while it retains control in the realm of political ideas, the party gives the writer relative freedom to be an *artist,* and by removing a major frustration, reduces his potentialities as a rebel. This particular lesson of the Polish-Hungarian revolts has not been learned by the Soviet Central Committee. Instead of allowing writers to be artists it forces them to be second-rate publicists—"second-rate," because to be a first-rate publicist one needs a political and intellectual freedom much wider than the license of form required by an artist. The policy of the Central Committee, therefore, has compelled Soviet writers to seek an improvement in their position by striving for a measure of liberty, which, if granted, would undermine the political and ideological foundations of the regime.

The "controversial" novels, plays and articles of the last few years (Ehrenburg's *Thaw,* Zorin's *Guests,* Pomerantsev on "Sincerity in Literature," Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone,* etc.) were the first truly publicist works to appear in the Soviet Union for decades. They also demonstrated that the realist style is effective only when it is employed to express the mood and outlook of those Russian writers of the last century who created it. In other words, they broke down the specious distinction between "socialist realism" and "critical realism." *The Thaw* reintroduced the theme of the Superfluous Man into Russian literature. Instead of faith in the future we find uncertainty in the present. Reality becomes complex and hence rather sad, instead of simple and joyous. Doubt, hesitation and introspection ("What is the meaning of life?" asks a character in one of Vera Panova's novels) belie the optimism of the still obligatory happy ending. In all this post-Stalin literature, how-

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ever conformist the author tries to be, the "shining heights of communism" are gradually being overcast by a haze.

Since the counterattack against "revisionism" in 1956 the party's policy in literature has been to suppress overt challenges to its authority while encouraging the writers to give a more balanced and truthful picture of life. They have been asked to write on contemporary themes with greater plausibility and artistic skill. Since perfection is always unconvincing, positive heroes may be endowed with human weakness and the difficulties and hardships of the transitional stage between socialism and communism may be frankly exposed. These concessions to greater realism have, if anything, made the writers' educational task more difficult. Virtue is tedious and Soviet readers are not exceptional in being far more interested in vice.

A Grounded Literature

The official speeches at the Third Congress of Soviet Writers, which was finally held last May after two unexplained postponements, show little evidence of concern at the obvious inadequacy of this modification of literary formula. In its formal address to the Congress, the Central Committee told the writers that their "high calling" is "to show truthfully and vividly the beauty of the people's labor exploits . . . to be passionate propagandists of the Seven-Year-Plan and to imbue the hearts of Soviet people with courage and energy." They are to do this by "giving every support to realist art which is opposed to formalist, idea-less art."

The monumentally tedious speech delivered by Andrei Surkov, outgoing head of the Writers' Union, spells out these two incongruous demands at inordinate length. But there are passages which suggest that he is aware of the contradiction between them no less than the author of the *Esprit* article. Speaking of the poverty of language in many recent Soviet works he observes that "content that has not found the right form cannot influence the minds and hearts of the readers." He virtually admits the incompatibility of realism and the portrayal of romantic, inspiring heroes when he says:

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We have many truthful and talented books about the life of the people, but what one of our great writers said ten years ago about our literature not being sufficiently *winged* is as valid now as it was then. Indeed, we seem to have difficulty in poeticizing the people of the present day.

Earth and air, it seems, mix no better in Soviet literature than they did in medieval alchemy. Surkov goes even further when he says: "We often forget that the portrayal of what is new in life demands innovation (*novatorstvo*) in form."

What would be simpler, then, than to encourage writers to go ahead and experiment? The answer is that it cannot be done because freedom to experiment might lead to formalism and "pseudo-innovation." Surkov's argument at this point is quoted in full because nothing could better illustrate the crabbed, infantile perversity of pseudo-dialectical logic:

In the 1920's and the beginning of the 1930's there was often heated discussion among writers about the novelty of Soviet literature in general, and innovation was understood as the search for a new form, for new linguistic possibilities of expressing the new material of revolutionary reality. Admittedly there was much that was false and pseudo-revolutionary in the debates of those days. Formalist quirks were often passed off as innovation . . . The struggle against these false interpretations of the idea of innovation was successfully concluded about a quarter of a century ago, because the rich literary practice of the Soviet epoch mercilessly destroyed all the inventions of the pseudo-theoreticians. Formalism now manifested itself only in certain cases of recidivism. But now it has come about that serious discussion of innovation in our literature has ceased altogether. Our literature is not subjected to a profound analysis from the point of view of the compatibility of the form of literary expression with the new material of reality.[1]

The older writers at the Congress will have remembered sadly that in many cases the pseudo-theoreticians were destroyed together with their inventions. They will also have wondered how it is possible to seek for new forms without courting the charge of formal-

1. Surkov's reference to recidivism is a fascinating example of how the language of criminology has become commonplace in Soviet literary debate. It is quite natural to talk of an "amnesty" for erring intellectuals.

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ism. Everybody will have thought back to the period just after Stalin's death when the party launched an appeal for "boldness" and when those who responded were soon being charged with "pseudo-boldness."

A Plea for Growing-Room

It was one of the older writers, Vsevolod Ivanov, who gently pointed out the absurdity of asking people to experiment without allowing them to do so. In what was almost the only noteworthy speech from the floor, he made a plea that the younger writers be given their head in this respect:

Young writers must be allowed and helped to experiment to find their own style, their own manner of writing. . . . It would occur to nobody to dispute the fact that a progress in science is unthinkable without experiment. Yet attempts to experiment in literature are not met with approval and the experimenter risks being classed as a formalist. In my opinion this is nonsense. There is not and cannot be any danger of formalism in our literature because formalism was a short and by-gone stage in the lives of certain literary critics and it by no means embraced the whole of Soviet literature.

The last sentence makes an important and obvious point that has probably never been publicly made before, namely that the very use of the term "formalism" (as in the Central Committee's message to the Congress) is an unwarranted extension of its original meaning. In the 1920's it was the term chosen by a small but very influential group of literary critics to describe their method of analyzing the linguistic and structural aspects of works of literature. Its pejorative application to writers was a misappropriation of the term.

Apart from Khrushchev's address, the only other notable contribution to the Congress came in the shape of an article by Konstantin Paustovsky, one of the more outspoken and rebellious of the older writers.[2] He discusses with notable frankness some of the fac-

2. About two years ago, using the comparative immunity of old age, he made a sensational speech at a public discussion on Dudintsev. It was never printed in the Soviet press, but a transcript appeared in a French newspaper.

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tors that "impede the free development of literature." The first is the lack of tolerance towards various, as he puts it, "isms." He speaks of them with unprecedented indulgence:

All these *isms* are the children of extravagant Paris and America. Beyond the outer ring of the Paris fortifications they lose their glamor, the soil that feeds them and they look far-fetched and unnatural. But even these extravagances (surrealism, decaphonism, dadaism and other *isms*) are essentially a completely normal expression of youthful impetuosity. There is no reason whatsoever to sound the tocsin and shout with panic, for the recklessness of youth is useful—it prevents the older generation from going to seed and regarding itself as infallible and "untouchable."

His second point is even more radical. Flying in the face of "anti-revisionist" orthodoxy, he disputes the standard charge that writers who fail to make a judicious balance between "negative" and "positive" have lost contact with the people. In a cautious phrase which could well refer to Pasternak as well as Dudintsev, he asks whether those writers accused of "isolation from the people" are really the ones guilty of it.[3] His answer, in so many words, is that the writers who are alien to the people are rather those who try to combine realism with phony optimism (*bodryachestvo*), who lace their work with high-minded sentiment, insert saving clauses and devise happy-endings. "Perhaps," he writes, "we shout so much and so loudly about truth in literature just because there is lack of it. . . . The people see everything and understand everything and they will never excuse falsity and deceit in a writer, however talented he may be." Comparing the saving clauses and the happy endings to the bows which a clown makes to the spectators before he leaves the ring, he comments:

It is well that Tolstoy was able to write *Anna Karenina* before the

3. The Pasternak affair was scarcely mentioned at the Congress. Only Surkov saw fit to refer to his "treacherous activities." But none of the other speakers took up the subject. The only other reference is by Galina Nikolaeva in an article published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on May 18, the opening day of the Congress. In a strikingly different tonality to Surkov's remark, she speaks *en passant* of Pasternak's "mistake."

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appearance of this tradition. He did not have to "bow" to anybody, even the publisher, and he allowed Anna to disrupt her family and die for purely personal and, therefore, impermissible, reasons. It is not acceptable to write about defects, however harmful they may be for the life of our society, without first making an exculpatory "bow" by mentioning our achievements. . . . Another useless and burdensome tradition is the reluctance to write about suffering, the fear of any suggestion of sadness, as though our lives should take place under a sugary sky to the cheerful laughter of "militant" men and women . . .

This article by Paustovsky amounts to a manifesto, audaciously close in spirit and tone to the demands for freedom (at least freedom from the absurd formulas bequeathed by Stalin and Zhdanov) which caused such a furor when they were first enunciated in 1953-54 and again with even greater insistence, in 1956. The fact that these demands could be reiterated at the Congress by a writer who previously had compromised himself as their ardent champion shows very clearly that, surface appearances to the contrary, the movement towards the emancipation of literature (and hence of intellectual activity in general) is still strong and undefeated. Talk in the West about the end of the "thaw" has been grossly exaggerated. The current flows even more strongly than before, but under a thin covering of ice. In a curious negative way the Writers' Congress indeed bears witness to the victory of the opposition. The lack of controversy, the calculated absence (or at least failure to participate) of all those writers who could have injected a spark of life into the proceedings, turned the Congress into a rather pathetic parade of old-timers.[4] It was all reminiscent of a demonstration by some dwindling political group whose members turn out to keep the flag flying, but whose arguments and slogans are so irrelevant that nobody bothers to contradict them anymore.

4. Mikhail Sholokhov, who arrived back in Moscow from his foreign tour two days before the opening session, did not speak, even if he attended. At the last Congress in 1954 he spoke scathingly of the "Olympian calm" of the proceedings and all but disrupted them by a series of scurrilous personal attacks on various conformist colleagues. It would be interesting to know what he thought of this Congress.

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Culture and Corn

It was only the appearance of Khrushchev which enlivened the Congress and perhaps saved it from being a fiasco. His speech was an impressive example of his impromptu oratory in the intimate and rather bantering style that he adopts in his discourses to the peasants and other producers of material goods. There are even agricultural similes: the fostering of young literary talent, for instance, is elaborately compared with the cultivation of corn.

It would be useless to look for any new thinking on ideological or cultural questions in Khrushchev's address. What he says is so conventional as to be irrelevant to the problems which vex the writers. Gone is the angry exhortative note which marked his three "literary" speeches of 1957, when he personally intervened to rap the knuckles of the "revisionist" recalcitrants. Indeed he now evinces something close to boredom with literary questions, and there is a note of mock-humility in his constant assurance to the audience that he is not really competent to judge literary matters. He informed them apologetically that he didn't really have much time left over from matters of state to do much reading and even then he often needed to prick himself with a pin to keep awake. One can only imagine the discomfiture of certain people in the hall when he went on to mention one book he had read recently without the aid of a pin, namely *Not by Bread Alone*: "Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan, who read this work before me, said to me, 'Read it —from some of the things he says it looks as though he has been eavesdropping on you!' " The embarrassment of those who led the campaign against Dudintsev can have been matched only by the relief of the majority on hearing that their works are no longer passed upon by an omniscient and malignant judge.

Khrushchev's main concern is evidently not that the writers should be ideologically pure but that they should keep the peace and not trouble the government with their interminable squabbles. He also makes it quite clear that they are no longer regarded as being so important as they believe: "Life is incomparably richer, more full-blooded and deeper than any work of art." Their mistakes, therefore, scarcely warrant all the fuss made about them. The

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following passage in his speech could very well have significant implications since it suggests a certain abdication by the party of its exclusive prerogatives in the control of literature, in favor of the corporate judgment of the writers themselves:

> You will ask: what guarantee is there against mistakes? Yes, it is difficult to give guarantees, because a writer, if he is a real Soviet writer, makes mistakes not consciously, not intentionally, but for a whole number of reasons, such as inadequate knowledge of life and incorrect premises, *etc.* In order to prevent this, one must remember that writers live in society, reflect the life of society, that their work must be guided by the criticism of society and that they must take account of this criticism. . . . Again you may say: "Criticize us, control us, if a work is incorrect, do not print it." But you know that it is not easy to decide right away what to print. The easiest thing would be to print nothing, then there would be no mistakes. . . . But it would be stupidity. Therefore, comrades, do not burden the government with the solution of such questions, decide them for yourselves in a comradely fashion.

This grant of relative autonomy to the writers is accompanied by guarantees that there will be no return to the "intolerable phenomena" associated with the "cult of personality" and also by a plea for tolerance and tact in dealing with colleagues, however seriously they may have erred. Wayward intellectuals, like hardened criminals (see footnote 1), are not incorrigible if they are given every chance to reform. Apologizing for the "crudity" of his analogy, Khrushchev told his audience how he himself had recently reformed a thief with a little kindness. In calling for comradely love and reconciliation, however, Khrushchev makes it quite plain that forgiveness depends on penitence and a contrite admission of defeat. One must "not strike a man when he's down"; but neither must one forget the immortal words of Maxim Gorky: "If the enemy does not surrender, he must be destroyed." Nor must the writers be allowed to forget that their role is primarily to assist the party in the education of man. At the end of his speech, through a remarkable unconscious blunder, he reformulated this sacred task of the Soviet writers in words rather familiar to Western ears:

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I saw some Americans three days ago. Among them was an old man, a judge. At the end of our talk he said . . . "I fear that when I get back and tell my friends about my impressions, some of them will say, 'The Russians have washed the old judge's brains.' " That's literally what he said. Not a bad expression. So there you are, comrades, you should wash people's brains with your works.

Despite the ominous reservations in Khrushchev's speech, it gives some hope that the life of the writers may now be easier. It may encourage editors to take greater risks in publishing ambiguous works, and it may give a weapon to the opposition against the hacks. If this comes to pass, the latter will feel much less sure of their ground in exposing "mistakes" and they will have to fight out their battles within the writers' organization instead of appealing for the Central Committee's arbitration. The composition of the new Secretariat of the Writers' Union, elected immediately after the Congress, shows that the conservatives will now have to contend with formidable opposition from liberals who wish to free literature from the trammels of the past. It now includes Tvardovski and Panfyorov, the editors of *Novy Mir* and *Oktyabr* respectively, both of whom were temporarily relieved of their posts by Surkov a few years ago for pursuing an overly independent line in their editorial policies. Surkov himself was dismissed as First Secretary of the Union and replaced by K. A. Fedin, who takes a rather cautious but tolerant view of the new moods among the writers. In his speech at the Congress he in fact came out on the side of freedom to experiment in form: "We value and respect innovators in science, industry and agriculture. The question is, may a writer rest content with the working methods of the nineteenth century?" It seems highly likely that under this new leadership there may at last appear in the Soviet Union some literary works of lasting and distinctive artistic quality. We may see the emergence of a new style which will give adequate expression to the age. It is idle to speculate what new forms might arise, but the author of the *Esprit* article offers one intriguing suggestion:

I put my hope in a phantasmagorical art, with hypothesis instead

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of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realist description of everyday life. This is what would best correspond to the spirit of our epoch. Let the *outré* images of Hoffman, Dostoyevsky, Goya, Chagall and Mayakovsky . . . teach us how to be truthful with the aid of absurd fantasy.

Mr. Hayward has added the following observations on recent events that have taken place since this article was written:

Developments in the few months after the Writers' Congress show that Khrushchev's speech and the subsequent changes in the secretariat of the Writers' Union have, for the time being, decisively tipped the scales in favor of the "progressives." Before the Congress the Stalinist diehards (Surkov, Sobelev, etc). though showing increasing signs of lack of confidence and nervousness, were nevertheless able to browbeat the progressives with appeals to high Party authority. This no longer seems to be the case and with the Party observing some degree of neutrality, as foreshadowed by Khrushchev in his speech, the diehards now create the impression of being on the defensive.

The great change in the climate may be illustrated by two examples: In December, 1958, the Union of Writers of RSFSR, a recently created body which is dominated by reactionaries (its president is L. Sobolev who made quite a career out of baiting "revisionists" in the difficult months after Hungary), held its constituent congress. Several of the speakers made vicious attacks on Pasternak and one of them added a new charge, namely that of "corrupting youth." It appears that two young poets, Pankratov and Kharabarov, students of the Moscow Literary Institute, had fallen under the spell of Pasternak, made "secret" visits to his dacha, written verse in imitation of him, hung his portrait in the Institute hostel and circulated a manuscript copy of *Doctor Zhivago* among their fellow-students. For these heinous offenses they "underwent their deserved punishment"—expulsion from the Komsomol.

In August this year the Central Asian newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* announced that the two well-known young Moscow poets Pankratov and Kharabarov had arrived in Kazakhistan on a

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travel-warrant issued by the Central Committee of the Komsomol and had honored the editorial board of the paper with a visit. The announcement is accompanied by two specimens of their work. Kharabarov's poem is entitled "On an Untrodden Path" and is a moving appeal for the right to go one's own way. Evidently there has been very powerful intervention on their behalf since last December and it seems highly likely that their total rehabilitation was made possible by the changes at the Third Congress of Writers in May.

The second example is an interview given by Ehrenburg in August to a correspondent of *Literature and Life*. He says here what he had said in a rather more disguised way in an article on Chekhov published just before the Writers' Congress. Among other things, he makes an unprecedented appeal for "solidarity" among writers:

"In the very difficult times of the eighties Chekhov spoke of the solidarity of the writers of that generation. Is it not time to give serious thought to the question of solidarity among writers in our Soviet epoch? Savage attacks on young writers, cliquishness, and novels in which authors settle accounts with their fellow-writers (i.e. Kochetov's infamous *Brothers Ershov*–M.H.) would be incompatible with such solidarity . . ."

The mere fact that such an unheard-of appeal for solidarity among intellectuals—the Party's grip on them has always depended on their *lack* of solidarity—can now be made speaks more eloquently than anything of the radical change of atmosphere since the Congress.

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F. W. Dupee

THE OTHER DICKENS*

In our time Dickens has been as thoroughly rediscovered as any writer of the past—assuming that he was ever really lost to view. His major novels are all once more in print, supplied with painstaking introductions by some of the best critics. In "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," Edmund Wilson has devoted to him one of his finest psychological studies; and Edgar Johnson's two-volume Life, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph,* is the definitive work in its field and a classic of modern biography. Only Dickens's letters have remained inaccessible, save in old, untrustworthy, out-of-print editions or in enormous, expensive, out-of-print editions of more recent date. An exception is *The Heart of Charles Dickens,* the volume that Professor Johnson has made from Dickens's letters to Angela Burdett-Coutts. But these are his communications to a rather special lady with whom he had a rather special relationship. Meanwhile, in the bulk and variety of his labors as a correspondent, Dickens made a great contribution to epistolary literature. His genius—as writer, friend, and public man—informs most of his letters, from the confident opening lines to the confident signature.

It was a remarkable signature for those days of emphatic identities asserted in fancy penmanship. The assertion of identity was emphatic but the penmanship was not fancy. It said CHARLES DICKENS in large, easily legible characters, and when there was space left on the page, the pen tended to race on, filling it with a long kite-tail of a flourish. In those free, full, unembar-

* This essay will appear as the introduction to *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens,* edited by F. W. Dupee to be published in March by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.

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rassed transfusions of personality which were Dickens's letters, even the flourish seemed to say something. One could read in it a reluctance to finish, a promise of more to come, a sort of "to be continued" such as he appended to the successive installments of his serially published novels. One of the incidental attractions of the letters is that they are rather different in spirit from the novels. Yet they obviously owe some of their disciplined spontaneity to their origin in a mind used to ready communication, affectionately conscious of an affectionate audience, aware that its productions were being eagerly waited for. No doubt this awareness sometimes weighed heavily on Dickens as a correspondent. He was a prodigy of good will and fluency, not a monster of them, and he could be perfunctory, slightly impatient, apologetic for lapses and delays, like anybody else. One acquaintance living in Lausanne seems to have expected him to report periodically on world affairs. This man inspired the only dull sequence of letters Dickens wrote.

For the rest, the promise of more to come was generally fulfilled with the expected liveliness. Dickens wrote to a number of friends through long, formidably busy years; while the unknown admirer of his work or petitioner for his charity was fairly certain to get a reply that was charming, thoughtful and believable beyond the call of duty. For Dickens made duty a pleasure if anyone ever did, and as a correspondent it was his pleasure to breathe amiability upon what he knew to be an unlovely world. His letters were acts of friendship, even when they were about business. Any claims they have on literature are primarily based on this consideration. He wrote them to further human intercourse, not to further the art of letter-writing as such. Whatever thoughts he may have had of posterity were probably attended by the hope that posterity would be disappointed. He made bonfires of the letters that came to him from others; and if he failed to ask that all of his own be destroyed in turn, it was doubtless from common sense. They were so numerous, so far-flung. Sitting down to his correspondence nearly every day of his life, when his literary work for that day was done, he wrote as many as twelve letters at a stretch and sent them off just about everywhere. Only a bonfire on a world scale could have destroyed the letters of Charles Dickens.

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His correspondents naturally tended to preserve them and they survive today by the thousands. The known or suspected losses in their ranks are few. These include the letters that he wrote to Ellen Ternan, his mistress in his last years, which exist so far only in rumor; and those parts of his letters to John Forster which Forster disposed of after pasting the other, and doubtless more significant parts, in the manuscript of his *Life of Charles Dickens.* In the largest collection of Dickens's letters to date, that of the Nonesuch edition of his work, they fill three tall volumes of some nine hundred pages each, and the projected Pilgrim edition of them will probably be larger by several volumes.

Their sheer abundance is one of the essential characteristics of Dickens's letters. Without it they would not be that *"autobiography,* unrivalled in clearness and credibility," which Carlyle said they were. They would not be "in themselves a life work," as Lionel Trilling says they are. Dickens's letters are a life work in themselves because they are distinct in bulk and partly distinct in spirit from his life work as a novelist, while being in their lesser way comparable to the novels in scope and quality. Their scope is Dickens's scope as the most popular good writer of his day and the master of his age in many of its extra-literary aspects. Their quality is his quality as a man and is as plain to see as it is intricate in its manifestations and causes.

A man of action if any literary man ever was, he writes his letters not as a spectator of events but as one who is in the thick of them. Indeed he is best at reporting events of his own making, and these were spectacular enough. He is no social observer as Horace Walpole and Henry Adams were in their letters. Of affairs beyond his reach he is a diffident, even impatient chronicler, unless he can project himself into them by some feat of comic fantasy. This he does, for example, in the case of Queen Victoria's marriage, which he proposes to prevent by storming the palace; or in that of the Crystal Palace exposition, where a tale told of a little boy lost at the exposition and wandering out into London under the impression that he was still inside the grounds contains the writer's whole exasperated response to that famous display of human progress.

Dickens is a man of action for whom the troubled, often fruit-

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less, distinctions between art and action, artist and man, artist and non-artist scarcely exist. His whole personal history works against them. His vocation for literature follows naturally, though by no means inevitably, from his youthful occupation as a reporter. He continues to identify that vocation with a regular trade or profession, and he labors to enhance its dignity in a society that is far from generous in granting dignity to the unestablished, whether persons or classes. The society's cruel exclusiveness is hateful to him; yet he strives to establish himself and his fellow writers in it on their own terms.

In all this Dickens's passion for justice is inflamed by an undying sense of outrage which had its beginnings in the now famous ordeal of his boyhood. The distress of the twelve-year-old boy who saw his father suddenly imprisoned for debt and was himself made to drudge long hours in the unaccustomed squalor of a shoe-blacking plant lives on in the mature Dickens, although he confides these facts to John Forster alone. Indeed the events of his twelfth year seem to have constituted one of those family crises that cast their shadow back over the family's past and forward over its future. For young Dickens it was a crisis of the affections as well as a crisis in the Dickenses' social history. A nestling suddenly thrust from the nest, he never quite forgave his mother for her seeming indifference to his sufferings in the blacking plant. Grown up and married, he tends to visit his suspicions and resentments on his own wife, who, aided no doubt by her intrinsic faults, is finally made to reenact the essentials of the mother's failure. At the same time he has fears for the social well-being of the family. His paternal grandparents were domestic servants; and although his father, John Dickens, succeeded in extricating himself from that class—he was first a government employee, then a journalist of sorts—he was given to improvidence as to a sort of fate. There was reason to guess that he was morally unequal to his improved position, remaining in a state of partial dependency; and John Dickens's genial fecklessness turned into an ungenial, even criminal parasitism in two of Charles Dickens's brothers. Hence Dickens's tremendous will to power, to success in the world, to respectability; and hence his affinity with another

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active type of his century (and ours), a type more ambitious than the craftsman or professional. Dickens is the artist as tycoon, dedicated to building up an impregnable personal empire, literary, domestic, financial. His ambition throbs unmistakably in his letters. Like our Victorian grandfathers whose sense of power was manifested in their weighty tread on the floor, their heavily drawn breaths, their loudly ticking watches, Dickens is almost physically present in his assured rhythms and turns of speech. He knew, as he once confided to his wife, "what a thing it is to have power." Yet his sense of power is infinitely refined by its supreme confidence in itself, in short by his consciousness of genius; and his greatness, unlike that of the legendary tycoon, is of the proudly accommodating kind. Much of the legendary life of that type is nevertheless in evidence in his letters. Three times he and his family make that significant move which Hardy describes in one of his wonderful "period" poems.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day. . .

Three times he moves, each time to a higher house. Indeed, no ordinary tycoon cared more for clocks and carpets and chairs—or mirrors and curtains and stairs—then Dickens does. In his householding role he combines the scruples of an ambitious hostess with the vigilance of a concierge. His passion for domestic order equals his sense of power but can seem more oppressive, for it often appears to operate at the expense of his wife. The poor "apathetic" incompetent Catherine Dickens, so tactless in company, so given to misdirecting letters, turning her ankle, falling through trapdoors on stages, dropping her bracelets in the soup—she is definitely not to be trusted as a householder. When he proposes to bring a guest home for the week end he must tell her to arrange the guest's room in such and such a manner and lay out a copy of *The Scarlet Letter* for him to read (the guest is a judge).

Yet Dickens has real cause for anxiety in these respects. With his large and clamoring body of dependents, including the ten chil-

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dren which the listless but ineluctably fertile Catherine bears him, he is often a very put-upon man, a condition which he supports with amazing humor, fortitude and cleverness. But he doesn't merely support this life; he turns it into elaborate gaiety with his inventive parties, games, theatricals, pet names. And if he sometimes seems to adhere to the type of the tycoon, like Scott, the elder Dumas, Mark Twain and other writers of the nineteenth century, he succeeds in avoiding what was often their fate. His unsuccessful ventures are few and he never knows the ultimate disgrace of a bankruptcy.

This triumphant man of action naturally admires the active virtues and suspects the passive ones. "What a long time he is, growing up," he says with wry indulgence about his father. "Manly," meaning what we mean by "mature," is a favorite word of praise with him; and his passion for maturity helps to determine the moral atmosphere of his letters. It is, however, an atmosphere in which the *style* of a deed, the tact or humor or pride that goes into its performance, contributes much to its value. In his feeling for the aesthetics of conduct he is not to be surpassed by Henry James. And in his moral sense the Dickens of the letters is more urbane, sinuous, experimental than the reader of his novels might expect him to be. Where the novelist is often instinctively identified with the stark taboos and inclusive judgments of the folk mind of his time, the letter-writer draws his standards more from his daily experience in the world, often ignoring the taboos, judging people according to their merits as individuals, or simply suspending judgment. The very firmness of his literary bond with the popular morality seems to allow him a large liberty when it comes to particular cases. The Victorian smugness—there are other kinds—which in its very excess of feeling seems to advertise an uneasy relation to the popular morality, is wholly alien to Dickens. He probably could not write what Thackeray wrote to his mother, speaking of *Villette*: "I don't make my *good* women ready to fall in love with two men at once." Nor would he, in all likelihood, simply *refuse* to read the dubious Balzac, as George Eliot refused.

Sometimes Dickens appears to be surprised by his own sus-

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ceptibility. Encountering a young woman whom circumstances have forced into genteel prostitution and who yet enjoys the love and respect of her brother and even humbly respects herself, he remarks that this is " a romance so astonishing and yet so intelligible as I never had the boldness to think of." It is: sexual vice is not generally compatible with respect and love in the world of his novels. Yet Dickens's personal story as it appears in his letters must often seem to us a romance that he never thought of as a writer. It is a romance in which, for example, a duke can be really noble and a woman with a past be completely charming. It is a romance, too, in which the poor and oppressed can arouse his unqualified ire, even when they are acting out of the very exigencies of their condition. This the unfortunate baker's man learns when he urinates, or whatever, on Dickens's gate, is threatened with the Police Act by the great humanitarian himself, and can only demand to know, as Dickens reports, "what I should do 'if I was him.' " It is a romance, finally, in which the rhythms of existence itself are largely indifferent to moral impulses. Here Time is the great force for change and no one is hustled to his destiny by any patrol wagon of a plot. People—his friends—merely alter with the years, for better and worse, as people seem to do in what we call "life" and in the kind of novels Dickens didn't write.

The differences are, however, far from absolute. Especially at moments of great emotional stress is the novelist firmly re-united with the letter-writer. The impulse of melodrama bursts out in him, as in the fierce accusations and final judgments he brings to the affair of his separation from his wife. On the other hand, his extravagantly idealizing tendency makes an unmitigated heroine of Mary Hogarth, his dead sister-in-law, as it does of the Little Nells and Esther Summersons of his novels.

The readers of Dickens's letters breathe not only an intriguing moral air but an exhilarating air of vast public acclaim. As between Dickens and his public, the acclaim is intensely heady, richly earned, cheerfully given, cheerfully accepted. Originating with the success of *The Pickwick Papers,* his fame is sustained by his continued performance as a novelist and by his other brilliant activi-

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ties. It follows him around all his days like a brass band and can be heard sounding from the distant square even when he is in seclusion. Indeed it has the peculiar interest of seeming to exceed its natural causes, as poetry does, or what is called "grace." A self-enhancing sort of fame, a celebrated celebrity, it is the kind of thing that people of all classes and tastes enjoy participating in. Dickens is the man you love to love, as Charlie Chaplin has been in his heyday, only Dickens is far more so. And Dickens never has a heyday followed by a fall from grace of the sort that often occurs in these situations. When opposition threatens, as it frequently does, especially in the easily stampeded American public which he confronts during his two stormy tours, he knows how to defy it and make it work for him. The band music never turns to jeers and never really stops.

His reporting of his exploits, in his letters, is a triumph of what I have called his accommodating pride. No other hero has ever made the life of heroism more attractive, more believable. Mere modesty is as foreign to him as mere vanity. He can delight in his fame without either exaggerating it or diminishing it, so that his readers become naturalized citizens of his privileged world and yet are allowed their sense of the privilege. Sharing the pleasures of his celebrity with his correspondents, he is able to avoid the nemesis of mere egotism. The Dickens of the letters is superstitious in the profound way that other great men of action have been superstitious. Rarely does he announce any plan without adding "God willing," as if intent on appeasing a still greater plan-maker than himself. So too with the news he gives his correspondents of his feats as a writer, actor, reader from his works, party giver, or whatever. He takes the curse off his ego by splitting his ego up. There is the Charles Dickens who writes the letters and there is "the inimitable Boz," that convenient alter-ego early bestowed on him by a former teacher. Dickens becomes, along with his friends, the fascinated observer of this phenomenal homunculus of a Boz. Boz can do anything. If he starts to break down under the strain, just feed him a dozen oysters and a pint of champagne and he will bounce back. Boz acts; Dickens watches, enjoys, and records the results in his letters. This process makes for accuracy as well as detachment on

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the part of the letter-writer. The creator of the fantastic Mrs. Gamp and the fantastic Circumlocution Office is able to convey the assurance that he doesn't fancify facts in his letters. Nor do the facts require embroidering; they are fantastic in themselves.

With the years his fame only increases, reaching a high point when at last he takes to the road as a reader from his works, face to face with his tumultuous public. Meanwhile the letters testify to a sort of counter-development in him, a growing consciousness of his inner self and its unappeasable desires. The "one happiness I have missed in life" begins to haunt him and make him fearfully restless. The one happiness is several things: sex, easy companionship, freedom from the self-imposed restraints of his impregnable personal empire, freedom to write in defiance of the Victorian taboos that he himself has done much to establish. All of these and more: he knows the intrinsic sense of loss of the supreme genius who is outwearing the possibilities of his culture, of his very condition as a human being. Dickens does not respond to this tragic process as Tolstoy does, by a flight, magnificent and quixotic, into the infinite. A man of action to the end, he meets the situation as he can—by putting his wife away, secretly taking a mistress, going on the road, amassing still more fame and money. On the question of literary freedom he is assailed by a sort of angry incoherence that is very untypical of him. He blames the English morality, blames those who find fault with it, and does nothing except to avail himself more and more of the greater personal freedom of Paris. *His* flight is limited by geography; and the scrutiny of his inner self, carried on in letters to Forster and others, has comparable limits. He undertakes it not as one who makes a practice of introspection but as one who is driven to it by a great need and rises gallantly to the occasion. Thus the risks run by the confirmed introspective are, at least, not Dickens's risks. He is in no danger of talking himself morosely and glibly out of existence. In his unprecedented—for him—confession to Maria Winter, despite all the sad things he confesses to, there is the exhilaration of discovery, the freshness of a relatively untried passion and idiom.

His pleasure in friendship never lessens, however, and he adds to his acquaintances the rather racy and adventurous—one gathers

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—Wilkie Collins, his occasional companion in Paris and Italy. Friendship seems Dickens's natural medium as a man. It remains generally unthreatened by the fierce demands he often makes upon his domestic intimates. He is obviously not a virtuoso of love but he is a virtuoso of friendship, practicing his art on all comers and thus transfiguring—as far as he can—the dreary realities of strife and boredom. But it is no impossible idyll of friendship that the letters record. Amiability can turn to bitterness and even something like physical revulsion. There is news of quarrels, and Dickens occasionally criticizes the people who are closest to him, complaining of Forster's loudness of speech and mildly caricaturing Collins's pretentious chatter about the arts. But there is a taboo on criticism for its own sake, and malice is definitely banned. Good will prevails, and not only for reasons of conscience. The friends addressed in Dickens's letters have a way of being more than friends in the abstract. He likes to put them to work, to associate them with him in various enterprises which redound to their common good and pleasure. John Forster is not only his intimate friend but his literary counselor and, on occasion, his collaborator in the financing and editing of periodicals. Forster is a special case of a general rule. Dickens involves others in his elaborate theatricals, interests them in his philanthropies, makes them contributors to his periodicals, engages them in strenuous well-planned excursions. A visit to the Honorable Richard Watson of Rickingham Castle is apt to center on the production of a play with almost everyone present taking a part. Friendship may sometimes be tried by these exertions but it is kept from languishing. This Victorian Falstaff embroils everyone in his intricate frolics and as a result they show unsuspected talent, earning large sums for charity and making the Queen laugh—she will not be excluded from the revels.

In most cases, it is true, his close friends are the kind of people who can profit from such exercises. Dickens's immediate circle consists of journalists like Douglas Jerrold, Mark Lemon and W. H. Wills, men of the theater like W. C. Macready, popular artists and illustrators like Daniel Maclise and Clarkson Stanfield, fellow novelists of wide appeal like Collins and Bulwer-Lytton. With all their differences and their often prominent egos, they have by trade

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or temperament a common accessibility to the gregarious London life and the resounding public occasion. This does not keep some of them from enjoying a high degree of intimacy with Dickens. Forster and Collins obviously share his confidences and know his opinions on most subjects. It is not in them, however, to be to Dickens what, say, Schiller was to Goethe, or George Sand to Flaubert, or Hawthorne to Melville. Evidently it is not in Dickens to require friends and correspondents of this stature, and the absence of them is doubtless felt as a loss to his letters considered as literary documents. He is often discriminating in what he says about works of literature, including his own works. But he is best in his powerful feeling for the general responsibilities and privileges of the literary profession. He is untempted by those further reaches of thought which, for many writers, make the exchange of letters with their peers an adventure and a necessity.

The power of thought displayed in his letters is of another kind. It stems from his concentration upon the world of actual experience, above all the world of social experience. The imposition of a new industrial order on a feudal order of long standing throws that world into confusion, fear and misery; and Dickens's mind is constantly harassed and exercised by the spectacle. But he takes thought of the abuses only with the intention of taking action against them. The *habit* of reform, which afflicts others of his time and will afflict even a Shaw, is absent from Dickens's temperament. In his letters he denounces the abuses rather less often than we should expect of so famous a champion of the unfortunate. He is too busy with his actual attempts at reform to devote much passion to their manifestations and causes. It is during his first tour of the United States, where he is not only greatly disappointed but—as a foreigner—relatively helpless to do anything, that he is most fiercely and consistently the social critic. Even in America, however, the essential concern of his criticism is clear. It is directed chiefly against the failures of intelligence and feeling in individuals. Whether he is criticizing the new practice of solitary confinement in prisons, or the tendency to conformity among writers, or the national love of boasting and snooping, Dickens usually comes down to the problem of personality. And although his name has

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become a byword for the reforming artist, there is in all his letters, I think, no mention of an abuse, from the Ragged Schools to the pirating practices of editors, that the most ardent conservative of our day would not find intolerable, an invasion not merely of the "rights" but of the bases of personality. In this way he remains the friend of the race as well as of his numerous correspondents; and it is to the race that his letters, careless as he was of their future, finally belong.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

I

I chopped down the house that you had been saving to live in
next summer.
I am sorry, but it was morning, and I had nothing to do
and its wooden beams were so inviting.

II

We laughed at the hollyhocks together
and then I sprayed them with lye.
Forgive me. I simply do not know what I am doing.

III

I gave away the money that you had been saving to live on for
the next ten years.
The man who asked for it was shabby
and the firm March wind on the porch was so juicy and cold.

IV

Last evening we went dancing and I broke your leg.
Forgive me. I was clumsy, and
I wanted you here in the wards, where I am the doctor!

Kenneth Koch

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LONDON LETTER

ELECTION BLUES

Perhaps it is a little late to be writing about the British General Election, but since we are going to have to live with the results of it for the next four or five years, I would like to say my say. As anyone who has read my other London Letters will realize, my say is both prejudiced and relatively inexpert. I give fair warning. What follows is less an analysis than a description of what it was like to follow one part of the campaign closely as a partial observer and part-time helper.

I had returned to England too late to get onto the voters list. Moreover, Hampstead, like Chelsea, despite its claims to be an intellectuals' borough, is a safe Conservative seat. So my wife and I went out to help the Labour candidate who was contesting another Conservative constituency just outside London. It is one of those Thames-side townlets where Army officers retire, maiden ladies pinch along in frail gentility, and wealthy businessmen commute. But recently some industry has moved in, the town is expanding and the potential Labour vote with it. There is a shortage of housing, schools, libraries; a good number of the workers have to camp down in an unspeakable trailer park just outside the town where facilities are non-existent and the rents high. In 1955 the Conservative majority had been eight thousand. Since then the town had grown, as it were, financially downwards, a Liberal candidate had moved in to split the vote, and the Conservative member, nearly decrepit when he was given the seat years ago, had grown no younger. So there was just a chance—remote but not altogether hopeless—that the Labour candidate might swing the election. After all, they say the man, if he is good enough, is worth a thousand

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votes, whatever his party. And in this instance, the man was very good indeed: a tough, white-haired, fire-eating Scot, who had gained his campaign experience the hard way, in Tynemouth in the 'twenties, had written a book on money, was an expert on Middle Eastern affairs, had done his stint of lecturing in the States and, above all, had that rare quality, a real political passion. The manifesto he circulated through the constituency was a detailed, carefully reasoned critique of the Tories and an equally precise exposition of his own principles. The Conservative, on the other hand, produced a brief little handbill saying, in effect, that he had done all right so far—in the manner, presumably of King Log, since his parliamentary record was, to all intents and purposes, a blank—and hoped he would be given the chance to do the same again. Personally, he liked golf and his wife cooked well. Admittedly, only Oxford dons vote on prose style; but on paper it looked as though there would be a Labour walkover.

Granted, elections aren't fought out on paper. But they don't even seem to be fought at meetings. The first one we went to was held in the hall of a local school. It was a foggy evening and the fog had crept into the corners of the room, giving the place a queer, churchly air. When we arrived, rather late, a local councillor was in full spate. He was a young man, plump and buttoned up tightly in a tweed jacket, who spoke with an awkward mixture of pomposity and nervousness—later we heard that this was his maiden speech—but would not be stopped. On he droned with a kind of foggy intensity, while the chairman tugged occasionally at his jacket, surreptitiously at first, then quite openly; the candidate stared glumly at his boots, and the candidate's wife peered down her nose at the offender. Finally and unwillingly, he sat down, apologizing for all the points he had not had time for. There was some ragged, scarcely polite clapping. Then the candidate was introduced. And within minutes the bored, inert audience was applauding, heckling, laughing, squabbling among themselves. We all talk politics with more or less heat, but it is only on occasions like this that one realizes the huge gap between the interested amateur and the professional. The young councillor had known his facts and

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had marshalled them with some indignation. Yet he was deadly. The candidate, likewise marshalling facts, likewise indignant, gave them a passionate urgency. It was not simply a question of tactics—of not enough money for this, too much for that, of jobs done badly and issues balked. It was, instead, a moral question of responsibility: of egotism versus impartiality, private interest or general welfare. And all this was implied not by preaching but by a certain fierceness of tone. He positively welcomed the hecklers, turning on them eager and derisive until he had turned their jokes against themselves and the audience was laughing. Then, in the middle of the laughter the candidate's face would alter, the corners of his mouth would drop like a tragic mask, and he would turn on the interrupters with an air of tremendous moral outrage. "Laugh if you must," was his implication, "but this is the kind of stupid irresponsibility on which social chaos, injustice and malpractice thrives." It was a brilliant performance.

The nearer Election Day drew, the more powerful the candidate became. Yet at the end of each question-time it became more and more obvious that hardly anyone had really been listening. The audience watched the performance enthusiastically enough, approving or disapproving according to their political colour. But the arguments, however carefully worked out and lucidly presented, seemed rarely to register. Occasionally there would be serious questions about the Labour programme, usually from workers at the local aircraft factories who were worried by the threat of automation and redundancy. The rest of the questioners were of two kinds. First there was a group of hecklers, about half a dozen of them, who had presumably been sent out by the local Conservative Party to make nuisances of themselves. They were led by a thin, grimly respectable young man, like a Dickens clerk, with an upper-class accent so carefully modulated that it sounded as though he spent a good deal of time rehearsing it. His henchman was a loud, bouncy youth with a red baby-face and black curls, like some Public School Dylan Thomas in sports clothes. Through every meeting, he sucked avidly on a long, bamboo cigarette holder. These two and their followers would appear in the middle of the meetings,

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settle themselves down as conspiciously and noisily as possible, and then fire off questions from a handbook the Conservatives had provided for such occasions. As the campaign went on, the candidate would welcome them jocularly and the rest of the audience occasionally managed some ironic applause on their entry. After all, they were the semi-official representatives of the other side.

The other class of questioner was the compulsive whose reasons seemed less political than neurotic. The great unknown factor in the Election was the floating voter. The polls revealed an extraordinarily high percentage of "Don't Knows" on whom the Conservative, Labour and Liberal campaign machines opened up ruthlessly. Invariably, the compulsive questioners would announce themselves as floating voters, which was a more or less direct demand to be treated with extreme politeness and all the interest accorded to a very special person. Almost as invariably, they rose simply to show off, giving little speeches which, only occasionally and with difficulty, did they manage to convert into questions. The candidate's difficulty was not to answer them but to keep his patience. It was a depressing business.

Still, he weathered it well, with an excitement and political intelligence that his Conservative opponent plainly lacked. When, on polling day, such an unusually large fleet of volunteers arrived with cars to ferry voters that the constituency mustered an eighty percent poll, it seemed our man might have a very good chance of bringing off the miracle. The count was to take place the following morning. Everyone was cheerful as we drove back to London to hear the first results coming in over the BBC. The good spirits did not last long. By 1 A.M. Gaitskell had conceded the election. The voices of Macmillan and Hailsham came over the radio in bleary delight; apparently, they were celebrating heavily. Most of the marginal constituencies had swung right, two of them to TV interviewers. One of the best Labour men had lost his seat to an ex-Naval officer and one-time hero who, he had freely admitted beforehand, was not interested in politics but had been persuaded to have a try by his wife. Two TV stars and the spirit of the "Silent Service": we were in for a distinguished government. At 4 A.M. we

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went to bed. The next morning came the news that our candidate had, of course, lost. Despite the heavy poll and the new crop of voters, both he and the Conservative had polled almost exactly the same number of votes as in 1955. The extra five thousand had gone Liberal. All the candidate's spirit and intelligence had got him precisely nowhere; he might just as well have recited advertising slogans to his audiences. It made one want to wash one's hands of the whole wretched business.

That was two months ago. Since then, what happened to Labour has been the theme of endless articles, conferences and bickering. Obviously the defeat depends on much more than the Conservatives' long and extremely efficient advertising campaign before the election, or the long and, for the Tories, equally efficient, hot summer which gave everyone a quite unprecedented feeling of well-being and prosperity—after all, the English usually have to spend good money abroad to get that sense of cloudlessness and ease that prevailed this year unbroken from May to October. The real cause of the defeat seems to be that, in a way, the Tories were right: there is an enormous prosperity in England now. And it has brought about a kind of Americanization of society. Only superficially does this have to do with the obvious signs: more cars and T.V. sets than ever before. It is, instead, a matter of the disappearance of the working class. The old division of society into aristocracy, upper-middle, lower-middle and working classes has gone. The aristocracy, as an effective social power, did not survive the First World War. Between the wars when, as Gaitskell recently said, the level of unemployment was never less than ten percent, the working class made its great bid for some kind of equality. But now when—again to quote Gaitskell—"we talk of unemployment as being serious if it rises above two percent," the working class has largely been assimilated into the lower-middle, the *petite bourgeoisie;* "the nation of shopkeepers" is no longer an insult, but a truth. Hence the Labour Party found the old Socialist principles, particularly nationalization, something of an embarrassment. "Leave well alone," said the electorate; and it made not a jot of difference that the "well" was based squarely on social

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amenities, such as Nationalized Medicine, that would still be pipe dreams if Labour had not been elected in 1945. It was John Wain who remarked that one of the more eerie features of the campaign was that Macmillan's slogan, "You've never had it so good," was an Americanism. Eerie but significant; for the old class structure based on instinctual and inherited differences, so much beloved by American critics of the European novel, has given way to an American class system based on money.

All this would be very much to the good if money were not quite as effective a snob-agent as class. For example, on Election Day I was ferrying voters to the polls from the trailer park outside the town. The place could hardly have been grimmer: gloomy, rutted fields with the trailers ranged round their edges, mud paths, no amenities, and, as I said earlier, grotesquely high rents. Yet wherever the trailers were lusher than average or had been replaced by miserable, but permanent little bungalows, there were Conservative posters stuck in the windows. Apparently the tiniest step up the financial ladder made the voters want to range themselves alongside Money, Big Business, Class and the mysteries of High Finance—no matter whether or not they were cutting their own political throats by doing so.

In the face of all this, Labour's strongest appeal was, I think, moral. For there, despite the prosperity, the Tories had left themselves painfully open. They had resisted the most passionately felt popular cause: the banning of nuclear weapons and tests. The Rent Act had caused a considerable amount of suffering for people forced out of their homes by doubled or even trebled rents. The building of schools, hospitals and roads was hopelessly inadequate. Their refusal to levy a capital gains tax—which the States, I believe, has had since the 'twenties—opened the way for some extraordinarily questionable take-over bids. The largely Conservative Devlin Commission had flailed their policy in Central Africa (perhaps it was another token of Americanization that the minister responsible did not resign when the Commission's report was made public). They had mismanaged Cyprus and given the language two new four-letter words: Suez and Hola. And so on.

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So it was providential when, just before the Election, a rumpus blew up in the City over a peculiarly crooked piece of financial juggling. Labour used it, of course, to the full, and in the public opinion polls the Tory lead grew slighter and slighter. Then at the last possible moment Gaitskell announced that if Labour was elected it would remove all sorts of unpopular purchase taxes. "Bribery!" cried the Tories, "You're trying to buy votes." They had a point. The silly gesture had lost Labour the moral initiative that was their strongest appeal.

In Labour's recent Blackpool conference Gaitskell outlined his seven fundamental principles for modern British Socialism:

1. An expression of what was once called a "bold, human movement on behalf of the bottom dog."
2. A belief in social justice and an equitable distribution of wealth.
3. A belief in a "classless society"—a society without snobbery, privilege or restrictive social barriers.
4. A belief in the fundamental equality of all races and nations.
5. A belief that the pursuit of material satisfaction by itself is empty and that the good society is one in which the human personality is developed to the full.
6. A belief that the public interest be placed above private interest . . . an insistence that the pursuit of private gain should not take precedence over the public good.
7. A belief that these principles must be achieved with and through freedom and democratic self-government.

Having thrown out nationalization, Gaitskell has left the admittedly protesting Labour Party with little except moral principles to go on. It is not an ideal position politically. But if Labour were able to make the best, instead of the next best, of a bad job, they might do immense good. I have mentioned before in these letters that young people in Britain are, to an extraordinary degree, non-political. One of the reasons for this is that they feel that professional politicians are more committed to manoeuvre than issues, that even a crisis like Suez provokes more a display of debating society tricks in the House of Commons than any serious moral lead. They are uninterested in politics because its procedures seem remote from what most concerns them. (It would be interesting to know how

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much support Labour lost by failing to take the initiative over nuclear disarmament.) Sometime before the election a Tory guilelessly admitted at a public meeting that Socialists were always more intelligent than Conservatives. If, during the next few years, Labour could use this intelligence to build up a reputation for serious, responsible moral leadership in politics—a kind of respect that Sir Stafford Cripps, even when most unpopular as Chancellor of the Exchequer, always commanded—their position at the next election might be unassailable. They might even educate the electorate into respect for something more than television sets and motor cars. But it will need intelligence and not the vague pulpit-thumping that usually passes for morality in public life. If Labour fails in this last and most difficult chance, it will take a major war to get rid of the Tories.

A. Alvarez

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Joyce Glassman

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1959.
Lawrence Goldin

(My commission expires March 30, 1961.)

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Lionel Abel

NOT EVERYONE IS IN THE FIX

You are not where you wanted to be, nor will you get what you expected. But do you want to go somewhere else? Where? Not easy to say, but it's not easy to stay where you are, either. You will stay too, unless you are like the reviewers for the dailies, who damned this play* almost to a man. Why will you stay? Not in any great hope of pleasure, but as you stay in a dentist's office, motivated by an aching tooth. If you had come to be relieved of your boredom, then you will not be satisfied. You will not be relieved. You will be even more bored than you were when you first came in. More bored and more amenable to further boredom, a state in which there is a certain fascination. You are bored stiff by the junkies on the stage; they are bored stiff too, with each other and with themselves. They are waiting for a "flash." What are you waiting for? They know what they want. You might decide of course that you know you don't want to wait with them. But for some reason you do wait, until their chance for a "flash" comes. And while you wait as they wait, certainly not for God and not even for Godot, you lose your perspective, that is, assuming you had one; in this there is a definite pleasure. The fact of the matter is you don't know what you are doing or why you go anywhere. Probably that is why you have come to see *The Connection.* And on the stage there are people, recognizably real, who are as disoriented as you are, but know that they want something, or at least need something. They are waiting for "horse," that is to say, heroin; it will be brought to them by a negro, appropriately named

* The Connection. By Jack Gelber. The Living Theater.

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Cowboy. Shall "horse" take them somewhere, and you along with them? Can you jump on after them and gallop out of your dull time into some undrugged eternity? This is not to happen. They get their dose of heroin but I think you will get no charge out of their "flash." After the waiting there is little release, the same dissatisfaction. These people certainly take no special attitudes; they're immersed in ordinary life, just as you are. No one is particularly bad, nobody notably good. Anyway, moral postures are hardly taken, and clearly do not count. If there is any hero, it is Cowboy, who gets the stuff, takes the risks involved in getting it, administers it to the others, and behaves generally like the doctor which his white uniform makes us feel he is. Does he take the stuff himself? Probably. But certainly there must be a greater thrill for him in getting hold of it. Also, he is master of the situation; he alone determines the quantity of each dose, how much each junkie can take, what amount might be fatal. Is there anyone who can ride "horse"? If anyone, that one is Cowboy. Yet we never see him take the stuff, and in this fact I see the only concession to conventional morality made by the talented young playwright, Jack Gelber.

Dull the place is, dismal the prospects, cretins the people, and yet you don't have a desire to go home. Certainly the music keeps you. The musicians, stacked up like instruments for most of the time, come alive once or twice or maybe three times, and improvise brilliantly, beautifully; this is music such as one seldom hears. However, the music is merely an interruption of the waiting; it serves better, I will grant, than a movie would between the time you get to a station and the time your train is supposed to leave. After all, the musicians are also in the fix. They too are waiting for "horse." And when they get "horse," they, at least, do something: they play, and marvellously. "Horse" really takes them somewhere, and us also. But not for long and not far enough. We come back.

And now a question is forced on us—it was insinuated all along—but we only come to recognize it after a while. The question is: What do we want, we who are not junkies, if we are not? Don't we too want a "flash" of one kind or other? A "horse" of some sort, a charge, if you please, a sharp sensation, a quick connection?

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Does any of us want something more than that? The "flash" may be a new girl, a new thought, a new job, a new compliment; what is the difference between these and the connection the people we watch are waiting for? And you will wonder: Am I different from these junkies? Do I aim at more than a few sensations, and if I think I do, isn't this because I have shored up my pride and health against ruin with a number of platitudes? Can you answer these questions? If you can, you'll be able to get up and leave the play at its most exciting moment, which, by the way, is not terribly exciting. But if you cannot answer these questions (and how many can?) then you will have to stay to the very end, which is long in coming, and scarcely distinguishable from the beginning. *The Connection* is a moral trap; but nowadays people like to get caught. Why not?

What adds to the play's power is that the characters are so like other people, though in such a different situation from most people. The junkies of *The Connection* are no "invalids of happiness." They are not people who have paid a great price for a great joy; if they were, they would be on a higher level than their audience; they would have a right to be on the stage. They don't have that right, in fact, except that Jack Gelber was cunning enough to put them there. There ensconced, they dominate, mainly by being so similar to the people watching them, which means also to you.

How many plays ask a real question as this one does? The answer is evident, and makes of *The Connection* something outstanding. I must add, too, that it is brilliantly directed and admirably played. It lacks incident, but why should there be any in such a work? I must add, too, that there are some Pirandellian details—I mean the playwright, producer and cameramen who intrude on the junkies to harass and photograph them—which are not in keeping with the general spirit of the work, and are, if the author will forgive me, plain dumb. Certainly a better way to involve the audience with happenings on the stage would have been for Cowboy to announce that anyone seated in the theatre had a right to a shot of "horse." Actors could have been stationed in the audience who

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would respond, and we would have been fascinated by the possibility of being in the fix too.

Heroin, I understand, does not induce beautiful dreams as opium and hasheesh do; this is not a drug for aesthetes; Baudelaire would not have favored it. Heroin is the drug of hi-jackers and band players; a Faustian drug, then, one which adds risk to risk, danger to danger, exhilaration to action. Certainly this particular drug seems consonant with the character of the times; it is not eccentric to take it while taking hasheesh or opium would be. Curiously enough, if we are normal people, not too odd, we have already opted for heroin even if we never take it. For if we were to become addicts, this would be our drug. Our lives turn toward it, and away from the more "aesthetic" drugs. So still another question is asked by the play: Why don't we too take heroin? We are, in fact, connected with it.

Not that there is any propaganda in this work in favor of addiction, for there is none of that. And thank God, there is no moral cant either; no moralizing à la Broadway. Nobody is shown on the stage in a state of torment because he would like to give up taking heroin. The torment of these people, and ours, too, insofar as we identify ourselves with them, is that for the space of more than two hours there is absolutely nothing else to take but heroin. Only that.

As the effect of heroin relates to action rather than to contemplation, so the play's focus is on moral, rather than on aesthetic values. Certainly there is little beauty on The Living Theatre stage; no pleasure at all to the eye, little in the language spoken. There is the thrilling music at times, to be sure, but even this is disturbing. It too suggests the drug which is to be or has been taken. Why go to see such a play? Why expose oneself to the nagging question: what's better than "horse"? Speak up.

I think it is the moral difficulty one feels in answering that gives this play its fascination. But to be fascinated is to admit to being without goal or purpose, to be unable to justify one's undrugged and apparently directed actions. Fascination or pride, we prefer fascination.

So the play judges its spectators, and the latter's judgment of

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it scarcely counts, be it favorable or unfavorable. What does aesthetic judgment matter? What is really of import is surely not one's judgment of dramatic merits or demerits. What matters is what matters most; life itself, how you and I live it, with what aim, what resolve, what enjoyment. What but prudence would keep us from getting on the stage ourselves if Cowboy did indeed offer to minister to us too? There is the thing forbidden; but what is so bad about it? No effort has been made to make it seem alluring; the whole business of waiting for it, getting it, taking it and getting that all-meaningful "flash" from it has been shown in as grim a way as the most conventional moralist could wish. No, there is nothing wonderful about taking heroin, not according to what I saw in *The Connection*. The disturbing thing, though, is the insinuation of the question: what else is wonderful?

For how many people, I wonder, is anything wonderful? If there are as many in that fix as I think, and if the play's effect is as salutary as I assume it to be, people everywhere should be urged to see it. I promise faithfully that whenever I see anyone in a state of moral disarray, spiritual collapse, worry about his goals, I shall send him to see *The Connection*. A play, of course, cannot provide one with a new spiritual state, but only sustain whatever spiritual state you have brought with you into the theater. Anyone who finds his life boring will find *The Connection* less so. But this is not for people who know what to do with their time.

There are what have been called: "high" experiences. These are limited in number, we can count them: love, friendship, heroic adventure, martyrdom (this is ambiguous, it is probably the lowest --not meaning by "lowest" basest—as well as the highest of experiences), the act of creation. Not much has been left out of this list, but it will be noted that for very few people are many of these so-called "high" experiences possible, particularly today, and they are becoming increasingly less so. In fact, the widespread yearning for artistic creation on the part of so many people not gifted in that special way, reflects something negative, not something positive. Namely, the absence of "high" experiences of another sort. But to come back to *The Connection*, is getting "high" a high experience?

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My judgment would be that it is not. But what is the view of the author? At one point in the play we have the following absurd and yet revealing incident: when the junkies are finally getting their shots of heroin and are being photographed by the cameramen, who are presumably to make a film about dope addiction, the writer of the script rushes on to the stage and begs for a shot, too. He, who can create something, needs the "flash" like the others. Who, that cannot create, doesn't need it?

A play is essentially a game but a game played with something sacred. A play is seldom made badly simply because the playwright doesn't know the game—dramaturgy is not as difficult an art as is generally thought, and most playwrights, even hacks, are able to pick up at least the elementary rules, occasionally even some of the finer points. What makes most plays bad is the fact that the playwright does not genuinely feel as sacred the particular value or experience which he pretends to so regard for the sake of his play's structure. For actually, the question of the sacredness of something is intimately linked to the very form of any play. I always notice in bad dramatic works the moment when the dramatist begins to pretend to have an enthusiasm for some value which his whole work belies. The falsely sacred—that is the bane of the theater. Whatever be the faults of *The Connection,* it does not give us that. In this play something really is at stake: our estimation of our pleasures, their occasionalness and their worth, our estimate of our health too, for what good is it unless we can be enthusiastic about something else than merely retaining it? There is nothing delightful in *The Connection,* little poetry, and a degree of pain; but from the fact that we are shaken up, disturbed and self-questioning when we leave the theater, we know that we have seen a good show.

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Harold Rosenberg

ART BOOKS, BOOK ART, ART

In Paris a new series of art books has appeared under the rubric of Cahiers du Musée de Poche. Thus Malraux' museum of the imagination has been supplemented by one of the pocket. In our time, apparently, art must be made portable enough to be packed into the head or stuffed into clothing.

How else could one keep pace with its frantic expansion? Each year more art is dug out of different times and places, to say nothing of the increasing generation of new works on all continents. The total "museum" grows ever larger; no one is equal to tracking its contents across its global dimensions; the only solution is to render them into forms that permit their simultaneous delivery everywhere. Without the transmutation of substances, even the professionals would soon be hopelessly out of touch.

Moreover, as the world of art keeps swelling, so, too, does the art world. Through cultural programs in all nations, additional segments of society discover in art pleasures not unrelated to the picture stories and treasures of childhood. While the actual audience of paintings and sculptures is still pitifully small, and may even be shrinking, the potential audience of art, or at least of the art idea, includes nothing less than the whole of humanity, from bishops to inmates of prison therapy wards.

The art in an art book is a collection of substitute images. As "objects" these are, of course, less than satisfactory: the picture plates lack the scale, materiality, surface, aging, environment, etc., of their originals—their color, even at the very best, is, inevitably, off.

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But is it as a poor substitute that the public of the art book accepts the work in it? Or is the "imaginary museum" of reproductions more suited to its tastes and its needs than the original paintings and sculptures?

In addition to dispensing with the time, cost and fatigue involved in tracking down individual creations, art-book art has one overwhelming advantage over the artist's product: *it appears in a context of knowledge.*

A book on Piranese or Matisse, on Zen washes or Szechwan reliefs, "covers" its subject or a defined portion of it. Through it you have not only "seen" Piranese, you have "placed" him, once for all. Aided by text, chronology, bibliography, lists of major works, you know more; perhaps most important, you know what you know.

Looking at paintings will not guarantee an equivalent mental gain. On the contrary, suggesting an infinity of creations, with endless possibilities of discovery in each, the direct experience of art contributes a lively sensation of ignorance.

It seems to me that the current vogue of art books arises from an appetite for knowledge which the book is better suited to satisfy than are art works themselves. It coincides with the emergence of art as a branch of learning and as a source of data for other branches of learning. Images in paint, metal, stone, have been made objects of investigation by historians, anthropologists, psychiatrists. He who has learned how to *read* a work of art will find in it valuable matter about individuals and societies. On the other hand, he who depends, as his grandfather might have done, on the normal processes of his social environment to introduce him to the paintings and sculptures that form part of his culture will end with neither art nor knowledge.

This is another way of saying that art has become part of "language"; it is a writing of sorts; and there is a growing difficulty in detaching the work from meanings of a literary and theoretical order. A painting now seems *to belong* in a book, instead of in its hiding place on a ceiling or in the gloom of a cathedral.

Pressed for disclosures by the social and historical sciences, art

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has also become a question to itself. The interrogation of painting by painters which has been the major force of creation in our epoch has brought forth a succession of enigmas—and this, too, has served to enlarge the role of the art book. One could appreciate, or believe he could, a nude of Couture or a scene of Veronese without the aid of commentary. In a modern painting, echoes of the response of painting to the artist's demand that it assert its premises resound between the frames. Confronted by the canvas, one awaits the deciphering of the text.

Thus no exhibition is complete without its catalogue in which "statements by the artist" are increasingly featured. Important shows more and more take on the character of art books, presenting wall-scale duplicates of the publications that will result from them.[1]

Doubling as museum director and author, the art historian has turned the *actual* museum into an imaginary museum where the paintings themselves function as illustrations to bring out the critical or cultural concept: the "periods" of Cézanne or Brancusi, The Nude Through The Ages, Abstraction And Nature, Eurasians Under Thirty. In the "retrospective" show or the show built around a theme, the painting appears as an enlargement of its own repro-

1. Part of this text appeared in the April, 1959, issue of *Encounter*. As if to collaborate in illustrating the point, the Museum of Modern Art presented in the fall of the year its *Image of Man* show, which carried the idea of the exhibition-as-art-book to the border of the ludicrous. Firstly, there was no reason *in art* why the show should have come into existence, not one single concept or problem of painting or sculpture having been advanced by the total effect of grouping these works together. Secondly, obedient to its thesis regarding anxiety and atom bombs, the exhibition did violence to the best works included in it—e.g., those of Giacometti and de Kooning—by placing them in an ideological and esthetic context utterly alien to them, as if one surrounded some pedestrians with a mass picket line. Lastly, with the book or catalogue issued for the occasion carrying an introductory sermon by Paul Tillich and metaphysical reflections by the museum director responsible for the exhibition, the show was a pantomime to the letter of the principle here enunciated that works of art are being presented as "wall-scale duplicates of the publications that will result from them" and that "the paintings themselves function as illustrations to bring out the critical or cultural concept" of the art-historian impressario.

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duction, like the blow-up of a fingerprint; once the show has been dispersed, only the picture in the catalogue will remain as the visual representation of the meaning of the work.

The liberation from "literary subject matter" boasted of by modern painting and sculpture has been accomplished by their transformation into literature. With images of genre and fable eliminated, the painting as a whole has become a *word*: one wants to know what the work "says."

For clues the public turns to the "personality" of the artist and devours biographies and novels and film romances of artists' lives as seasoning for its monographs and "studies." Insecure in the face of art's mysteries the audience appeals to their human source —and is told by the artist to go back and stand in front of the canvas.

But while the painting is supposed to speak, it has become nothing else than what is said about it. In a painting of Pollock or Still, "criticism" is ground in with the pigments. This coalescence of art and comment is exemplified by the art book, in which the artist and the historian-critic compete for the last word.

As the painting is swallowed up in interpretations of it, the disparity between its physical reality and its published image vanishes or, as we have indicated, the advantage comes to lie with the latter. The actual work becomes at length simply the mold from which handier copies have been made: its fate is either to serve the various uses of the museum or to be collected as a relic of the artist's person, like fingernail parings or a hand-written manuscript.

By extending its influences beyond the material environment of the work, that is, by setting itself afloat as "culture," art has succeeded in achieving value with a public unable to prize it as a possession.

In America the interest in painting, especially since the War, enormously exceeds the buying of it. The market is for Art not for works of art—there are collectors for whom any work by So-and-So will do; recently, I have heard of sales of unseen paintings consummated over the telephone.

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This generalized interest feeds on anything—as the Directors of the Museum of Modern Art have demonstrated with the successful marketing of their membership "package," which for a single fee supplies admission to exhibition openings (the second opening; the first is for especially invited guests), tickets to film showings, service in the terrace cafeteria, discounts on art books.

In addition to being a thing to learn, art has become something to do; and the art book is one means by which the individual work is rescued from its corner and brought into the program.

The art book, then, is a phenomenon of the modern conversion of art into an aspect of intellectual culture open to all, rather than, as formerly, a source of delight and of taste-cultivation for an elite, or an implement of ritual.

It is easy to condemn the predominance of art books over art works as typical of the breakdown of "organic" experience in our mass civilization and its replacement by knowledge or by a mere illusion of it. It is equally easy to acclaim the spread of art publications as a sign of mounting public understanding and the means of a general elevation of taste.

Both these interpretations seem somewhat beside the point. The fact is that art's relation with society has been changed and thereby the character of art itself, past and present.

Given the new reality of art as a document, it is futile to apply the standard of an aristocratic contemplation untroubled by the questioning mind. On the other hand, wider knowledge of art is no evidence that art is taking on a larger part in contemporary life, since experience of art can only come from looking at works and this leading to engrossment in the particular has more to do, as we have indicated above, with ignorance than with knowledge.

For a sound art education we need to augment our knowledge through art books and develop our ignorance through works of art.[2]

2. Frank Lloyd Wright's recently opened museum on Fifth Avenue has been criticized on the grounds that its inclined ramp is not conducive to contemplation. The question of contemplation is also involved in the Museum of Modern Art's current drive for twenty-five million dollars to

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Such an education can, however, hardly become universal, given the present extreme shortage of paintings and sculptures in relation to the tremendously enlarged requirements of democratic society. In the United States, for example, despite impressive institutional advances since the 'thirties, there are still cities, including university centers, where not a single representative painting of this century is on permanent public display—overflowing art classes are compelled to rely entirely for objects of study on the library and file of slides. In short, we are condemned to mere learning.

In part, the shortage of art works is owing to poor distribution —good paintings have no market until they are singled out by the masterpiece cult of the popular media and the museums. But if all the paintings moldering in cellars and studios, or being destroyed through re-use of their canvas, were put where people could see them, there would still not be enough to go around.

In any case, to restore the balance between the work of art and the creations of the printing presses, immeasurably more paintings and sculptures are needed—and this means more artists. Perhaps they are on their way through do-it-yourself, though this also results in more art books.

allow, among other things, paintings and sculptures to be presented in separate rooms, what one might call contemplation cubicles. The odd thing is that this notion of contemplation should be trotted out by experts and officials intent on mass education—apparently, they are aware of no contradiction between contemplation and art history. Thus Mr. John Canaday of *The New York Times* attacked Wright for expecting people to contemplate at an angle, yet a few weeks later expressed a preference for an historical arrangement at the Museum of Modern Art over its projected isolation of works in meditation chambers. This matter ought to be settled: do we go to a museum to contemplate paintings or to learn about them? Frank Lloyd Wright, in putting the public into his *machine for having seen paintings*, had no doubts on the score: give the contemporary museum-goer the whole works in a single descending movement and out before he knows it. To Mr. Canaday's sentimental complaint, he might have retorted: Yeah, but who contemplates?

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BOOKS

A QUEST FOR PERIL

ADVERTISEMENTS FOR MYSELF. By Norman Mailer. Putnam. $5.00.

Norman Mailer's new book is a miscellany of stories, excerpts from novels, essays, musings and conundrums, all packed together with an italicized running commentary which forms a portrait of the artist as young Seeker, Rebel and Outside Dopester. It is a rowdy, intense and exciting book; and since it systematically sets out to assault the decorums of liberal moderation, it is certain to stir up bitter hostility. Let it: almost any response is better than what Mailer calls the "false sweetness" of our culture.

The running commentary, done with bravado and good humor, as at times with an utter willingness to risk full exposure, contains some of Mailer's best writing. It is post-depressive Mailer, bouncy and high in rhythm, and full of a passionate belief that "I am imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time." Mailer is one of the few younger writers who has made his public self—his personality, his ideas, his claims—into a matter of legitimate interest, in the way a writer like Hemingway once did. In both the best and weakest sections of the book, one is also struck by Mailer's absolute unwillingness to settle into his achievement, his impatience with a style as soon as he comes close to mastering it, his devotion to restlessness as a principle of both life and work. *Beware of the death called maturity*—so runs a recurrent motif, or really a string of brotherly tips, in this rasp against adjustment.

Whether Mailer will become the great writer he candidly admits he is ambitious to become, no one can yet say. For all of his chest-thumping and bugle-tooting, he has a sharply realistic sense of the odds: he knows that a writer who sets out on a deliberate

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search for peril may end by paying heavily in strength and spirit. But one thing is clear, that simply as a writer he is enormously, even outrageously talented.

His early stories, written in college as imitations of proletarian fiction and Dos Passos, already reveal his characteristic mixture of professional skill and a refusal of the professional stance. Several excerpts from *Barbary Shore,* which I remember as a very bad novel, are included and they read astonishingly well, with a nervous jabbing accuracy which lends some support to Mailer's claim that the book has "the air of our time, authority and nihilism stalking one another in the orgiastic hollow of this century." There follow a few war stories which illustrate his large capacity for mimetic vividness, for arranging sensory notation so that there will emerge a shaped and tacit meaning. In these pieces, as in *The Naked and the Dead,* one can also see the weaknesses which have marked Mailer's fiction until very recently: first, that his prose, betraying too strongly the influence of thirties' journalism, is often flat and ungainly; second, that while superb at evoking an aura and springing a sequence of action, he has not yet looked into or cared about a character deeply enough so that the character can burst out of the fictional schema and into something like autonomous life.

The single best thing in the book is a long story, "The Man Who Studied Yoga," which occupies a place in Mailer's writing like that of "Seize the Day" in Saul Bellow's: the one work in which the writer breaks past his self-image, to confront with absolute candor the ruins of experience. Just as "Seize the Day" makes a good part of *Augie March* seem self-indulgent, so "The Man Who Studied Yoga" makes a good part of *The Deer Park* seem willed and theoretic. Here, in simple transparent prose, Mailer observes the burned-out rancor, the sourness of the generation that came to maturity in the thirties. Tired, drained, weary of both their comforts and complaints, a few Jewish ex-radicals—a dentist, a lawyer, a comic-strip writer— spend a Sunday afternoon together in New York. They exchange bits of gossip, suffer the noise of their wives, throw off the gripes of middle age and—here Mailer makes a bold, almost allegorical leap—watch together a pornographic movie, the one stimulus that can now jerk them into a

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moment's vitality. At the end, again jaded and dull, the central figure "enters the universe of sleep, a man who seeks to live in such a way as to avoid pain, and succeeds merely in avoiding pleasure. What a dreary compromise is life!" Reading once more this admirable story, I can't help wondering whether Mailer's recent decision to choose extreme states of being for his central subject is, in literary terms, a wise one. Perhaps his true gift is to be a recorder of "the flat and familiar dispirit of nearly all days." But I don't suppose he will appreciate being told this any more than Bellow would, and both of course are right to go their own, necessary ways.

At the heart of Mailer's recent literary and intellectual adventures lies a fear which he shares with many reflective people: the fear of stasis, of an historical period ruled by functional rationality and increasingly deprived of the hunger for utopia. All of his recent writing seems to ask, Is it possible that "the smooth strifeless world" in which most cultivated Americans now live will prove to be the world of tomorrow, a glass enclosure in which there will be a minimum of courage or failure, tests or transcendence? It is a prospect invoked by the rise of mass society, and for those of us raised, or ruined, by the ethic of striving, dissatisfaction and renewal it is a very disturbing prospect.

Mailer shows certain signs of an ideologist whose ideology has melted away. Without succumbing to the genetic fallacy or being scornful of a dilemma which in some ways I share, I can't help seeing a touch of truth in Jean Malaquais' criticism that in "The White Negro" Mailer was searching for a new "vanguard" to replace the slumbering proletariat, a new self-propelling force to jog history. What the socio-economic position of the working class was supposed to do for or to it, the hipsters' drive for self-gratification, unbroken by convention or morality and acted out in life rather than piddled away in psychoanalysis, would now do for them. But some qualifications are needed. Mailer's search probably began in the political terms Malaquais suggested, and partly it may remain that; but by now it has become something else, a concern with the orgasm in its own right, a quest for a free-floating state of being in which desire satisfied and desire forever expanded become the measures of life. Some conflict seems to be involved here, between

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a therapeutic vision of desire and an ethic of what might be called a permanent revolution of the senses—it is a conflict between the Mailer who thinks of sexuality as a mode of health or reconciliation to the self and the Mailer who thinks of it as a strategy for social renewal.

Still more recently, Mailer seems to have turned toward a generalized quest for new sources of energy, new sources of motion and rebellion, in which sexuality is in danger of becoming a mere metaphor. At one point he suggests that for man to restore his self and reaffirm his potency would mean to recreate the vital image of God, since God cannot be God until man becomes man. God becomes the name of his desperation.

This mixture of Lawrence, Emerson, Reich and some Marx carries the further implication that the achievement of sexual well-being or even a proximate version of it would have revolutionary social consequences, though I think that here Mailer's argument staggers a little. For he never succeeds in showing why the transfer of energy need take place from sexuality to sociality, other than remarking, almost as if he had lapsed into ethical culture, that "in widening the area of the possible, one widens it reciprocally for others as well." Mailer seems to be falling back upon a curious analogue to Adam Smith's invisible hand, by means of which innumerable units in conflict with each other achieve a resultant of harmony and cooperation.

In any case, one can see here again Mailer's hunger for new possibilities and modes of transcendence, even if they break forth in claustrophobic sexual images—a kind of transcendence from below, with the orgasm replacing union with the godhead, and man finding the kingdom of heaven in the darkness of night, borne aloft on the thrust of a resurrected phallus.

"The White Negro" is a remarkable display of dialectical prowess and phenomenological searchings into a new style of life; yet one may be forgiven for wondering whether the phenomenon itself is really there. The hipster, does he exist? Do living specimens, bearing the psychopathic grandeur with which Mailer invests them, actually walk the streets of our cities? Beatniks, beards, other sorry little chaps; but Mailer's brand of hipsters?

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I am emboldened to ask because Mailer has had the chivalry to reprint from *Dissent,* where the discussion first appeared, not only Malaquais' criticism but also another and very effective one led by Ned Polsky who argues that Mailer is romanticizing the hipster, especially when he tries to create a philosophy of Hip. Far from being a figure of violence, daring and freedom, the hipster, says Polsky, is really the ultimate in self-estrangement: inhibited, puny in orgasm, weak in mind and feeling, driven in behavior, caring mostly to be left alone by the cops, and whatever else, hardly a force that for good or evil can shake the society in which he hides. Put another way, it seems likely that our mass society, with its astonishing capacity for absorbing friend and foe, Ph. D and junkie, may well succeed in domesticating the hipster, if it hasn't already, and in transforming his world into a docile sub-culture regularly visited by social workers, anthropologists and tourists.

Meanwhile, I think Mailer is in danger of being carried away by the fertility and brilliance of his own metaphors. Using cancer as a synecdoche for the spread of social rot, he begins to talk as if he knows it to be psychosomatic in origin. Hunting for an emblem of energy in the hipster, he seems at one rather shocking point in "The White Negro" to be praising the violence of a hoodlum who beats up an old storekeeper. Even if one puts aside the ethical question, which certainly should not be done for long, this kind of thing can be very dangerous to writers. They are professionally infatuated with language and therefore prone to develop treacherous powers of self-delusion and self-incitement, as is shown only too strongly by the experience of the many twentieth century writers who have become fascinated with violence.

Mailer is now beginning a new and very long novel, of which two sections—one a series of windy speculations, the other a description of sexual battle that pulses with outrageous humor and energy—appear in *Advertisements.* He is trying to enter new areas of experience and feeling, and the problem will be to what extent his ideas will help him to see and to what extent they will predetermine his vision. Perhaps, as one wishes him luck, it will not seem captious to add the hope that, even as he tries to embody his new perceptions in fiction, he will also allow some play to his con-

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ventional but exceptional gifts for social observation and narrative.

I expect that in six or seven years Mailer will write a story called "The Man Who Studied Yoga, *II*." The plot will be simple. On a depressing Sunday afternoon, several prosperous and now middle-aged former hipsters will meet for quiet conversation. A little wistfully, they will remember the excitements of their youth and how, with time, these have gradually evaporated. Nothing can now recreate for them the kicks of the past, neither drugs nor orgy, violence nor promiscuity. By chance one of them will pick up a volume of that forgotten writer Marx and read a few apocalyptic pages—which, as people not accustomed to reading, they will find almost as stimulating as a pornographic movie would be for squares. But soon the electricity in their souls will start to flicker, and the story will end with the central figure entering "the universe of sleep . . . . What a dreary compromise is life!"

Irving Howe

WHAT IS CULTURE?

CULTURE AND SOCIETY: 1780-1950. By Raymond Williams. Columbia University Press. $5.00.

Traditionally Americans have been made uneasy by the word "culture." They suspect snobbery or some high-toned moral prescription, and they grow self-defensive, as was Ezra Pound when he spelled it "Kulchur." But if the word is understood not as a prescription but as a description of the national way of life and therefore of oneself, it is more acceptable. And in fact during the last few years, encouraged by a deluge of books explaining America to Americans, people of all intellectual and non-intellectual hues have been talking about "culture," especially "our culture." America and its native spirit turn out anew to be somewhat bewildering

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phenomena. Nevertheless certain usually unspoken assumptions about them have been agreed on, and despite all the talk about changes in manners and morals and in the structure of social power, these assumptions have been of the most conservative nature. Not only that—the idea of "our culture" has become the rationale of a profound quietism and inner despair.

One of the common assumptions is that the national life has settled into its mold and that we will not in the future see any real changes in our political, social, and moral life. Rather, we will continue to relive, with increasing self-knowledge, certain classic situations which, as we look back over our history, we can see illustrated by our manners, codified in our Constitution, and dramatized in our literature. Another assumption is that despite alarming reports from psychiatrists the American character is stable. The American is seen as a divided man who contains within himself the dialectical contradictions of American life, but whereas his dividedness once drove him to radical partisanship or heroic activity, he has now learned to manipulate and balance his self-contradictions and thus to render them static and benign. As a part of this conservative tendency, the fascination with "our culture" has resulted in the slow absorption of radical ideas of all sorts into a Sargasso Sea of cultural, sociological, and psychiatric symbolisms, where they have been lovingly drowned. Hence cultural inquiry has lost its intellectual and reformist content and has become a mode of aestheticism or linguistics and symbol-seeking, shading off into introspection and mysticism, or at best a stoic resignation. From one point of view "culture" now often seems to be what radical critics have always suspected it was: a set of attitudes and moral injunctions whose hidden purpose is to reconcile mankind to the status quo, though perhaps improving its manners and increasing its self-knowledge. What we have forgotten is that culture is a continuing process, a way of changing, or it is nothing.

Raymond Williams' valuable book provides us with a much needed opportunity to reconsider these matters, even though his field of observation is almost purely British. His main purpose is to trace the meanings of the word "culture" from the time of Edmund

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Burke and William Cobbett to the present. This naturally involves considering the evolution of other words, such as "industry," "democracy," "class," and "art." How, when, and why, Mr. Williams asks, for example, did "art," which in the eighteenth century meant any kind of skill, come to refer exclusively to "creative art," and how did "art" and the "artist" come to signify autonomous entities, resembling an institution? Similarly, how did "culture," which once meant no more than "the tending of natural growth," as in "agriculture," come to mean a human pursuit of perfection or a body of activities and values that all critics of society or of art have had to deal with at least since the time of Coleridge. Obviously the idea of culture arose as a response to democracy and the industrial revolution. It is not so obvious what we mean by "culture." The value of Mr. Williams' book is not only that it traces for us the history of the idea but that it also forces us at every point to try to define it for ourselves.

By analogy with natural growth towards fruition, "culture" could readily come to mean "a state or habit of mind," leading to individual human perfection. But the further step, by which "culture" came to mean an autonomous "body of intellectual and moral activities" which was at once a standard and a court of appeal, was taken when critics, whether radical, liberal, or conservative, became alarmed about what was happening to human life as a result of industrialism and democracy, and when these critics, furthermore, perceived that the old religious and traditional safeguards against anarchy and barbarism could no longer be counted on. So far, "culture" is a way of personal life and a criterion by which to judge society. But of course from the beginning, and in our own time more than ever, the idea of culture has had an anthropological dimension, referring to the whole life of a society. In this meaning "culture" is both a criterion of judgment and an objective description. The double meaning is implicit from the beginning, because from Burke and Cobbett on down through Southey and Robert Owen, Coleridge, Carlyle, Newman, Matthew Arnold, William Morris, and so on to D. H. Lawrence, Tawney, T. S. Eliot, Leavis, Orwell, and Mr. Williams himself, the assertion of "culture" has

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been in large part a protest against utilitarianism, *laissez faire,* and whatever in human life is disintegrative, discontinuous, "unnatural," mechanical and atomizing. In one way or another from the conservative Burke to the Left-Labor Williams (as one makes him out to be), "culture" has asserted an organic, continuous, natural, corporate way of life, along with its perennial duty of furnishing a more or less abstract intellectual and moral standard. Not only has society been seen as having or needing culture, but as being, or ideally becoming, *a* culture.

This double meaning is one thing that complicates and obscures much American writing on the subject. American critics, as has often been observed, feel the necessity of perpetually discovering and indeed inventing "American culture" in order to talk about it. One may envy Mr. Williams, who, although he recognizes the difficulties involved in the double meaning of "culture," follows his illustrious predecessors in generally assuming that there *is* a British culture and that for all practical purposes he knows *what* it is. And so when he speaks of culture as "a whole way of life," he is free to think of it almost exclusively as a mode of criticism, "the effort at total qualitative assessment." He doesn't have to face the hazards and fatigues of half-creating something in order to criticize it.

Mr. Williams' book is a model, not notably of literary style, one must admit, but of plain speaking, fairness, and concentrated history-telling. The book is so concentrated, indeed, that summarizing it in a short space is impossible. I will content myself with simply noting some of the services he seems to me to have performed. He discovers unsuspected value in the Tory writings of Southey. He reminds us (and we need reminding) of the extent to which all the Romantic poets were concerned with social matters. He traces the processes by which two of the main components of "culture" emerged from the Romantic movement: the autonomy and high calling of the artist and the idea that art is a form of superior truth. He points out also the dangers involved in this—among them, the growing isolation of the artist, the burdening of art and the artist with moral and religious functions which do not properly belong to them, the allied tendency to make of poetry (as

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Mill did in reading Wordsworth) not so much an emotional fulfillment as a substitute for emotion and a mode of psychic salvation.

The chapter on the industrial novels of Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Disraeli, Kingsley, and George Eliot is fresh and useful. The fantasy of circus life as an apparent "answer" to industrialism in Dickens' *Hard Times* is described as "adolescent." Disraeli's anger at the industrial system, though not scorned, is called "the generalized anger of an outsider making his way." All of these novels, genuine as they are, seem to Mr. Williams to illustrate equally a middle-class concern for and fear of the working-class—a fear of violence and revolution which history has proven baseless. Matthew Arnold naturally comes in for extended discussion, and yet despite his pivotal position in the development of the idea of culture, Mr. Williams finds him more vulnerable to argument from historical reality than Burke and Newman. Williams is too astute to echo the old charges that Arnold's "culture" is merely snobbish and literary (though he does toss the word "priggish" at the author of *Culture and Anarchy*). Yet he finds basic equivocations in Arnold's account of the relation of culture to politics and to social facts, as well as a final indecision as to whether culture is an absolute (with or without divine sanction?) or a process. Morris is "the last of the great Victorian rebels," speaking an old-fashioned moral rhetoric but looking forward to the increasing alliance of culture with the working-class.

In the discussion of guild socialists like Penty and Cole we begin to hear much about "community" as against "mass civilization." Mr. Williams pays tribute to Lawrence's "instinct for community" and "his endless venture into consciousness," and apparently identifies himself a good bit with Lawrence as one who also knows by birth the "living process" of the working-class and the struggle to bring that process to consciousness. The main effort of Eliot, Richards, and Leavis, says Mr. Williams, was to bring art back into the context of society and culture, after the "aesthetic" excursion of the *fin de siècle*. The English Marxists are examined in some detail and are found to be in a final confusion as to

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whether culture is determined by the economic organization of a society or whether it can determine or effect this organization. Orwell is treated pretty roughly, as it seems to me, perhaps because at this penultimate point in the book Mr. Williams is working himself up to his own formulations. Orwell is portrayed as the culmination of a tradition of romantic exile or "vagrancy," the virtues of which are mostly negative, though salutary as forming the means of sharp and tough minded but often brittle and even hysterical criticism of society. Probably Mr. Williams should leave it to history to decide whether the "nightmare of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" depicts an "objective threat," or, as Mr. Williams thinks, is merely a reflection of Orwell's own inner "tensions."

A fundamental weakness of the idea of culture as a moral program has always been that it could find no satisfactory objective base in the social order. What class, group, or institution would embody it? Coleridge's "clerisy," as an actual possibility, was obsolete in his own time. Carlyle could not persuade the Captains of Industry to be the bearers of culture. Matthew Arnold, after rejecting the aristocracy, middle class, and working-class, counted on a "remnant" of disinterested spirits from all classes who would somehow influence society through the State, but the State was either the instrument of the capitalist order he disapproved of or it was merely an idea, so that like Eliot after him he was forced to fall back implicitly on the capitalist class structure. In more recent times the modern "mass society" has been forming various elites, sometimes with little regard to class origin, and these elites have been proposed as alternatives to a class base. Mr. Williams thinks that despite their ideal flexibility and the rapidity of change among their members, the new elites would be only old classes writ large, and that they would be "divisive," "dominative," and "exploitative" if culture were entrusted to them.

Mr. Williams himself, as we see from his Conclusion, tends to base culture on the working-class. He does not think that the working-class *has* a complete culture or is by itself at present a complete base for culture. He rejects the terms "working-class culture" and "bourgeois culture" because they suggest a more clear-cut division

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than exists. But he finds in the working-class the indispensable virtues of "solidarity," "participation," and "community," and it is here that he is farthest from the current mood of American intellectuals. He has some excellent pages on the damage to the human good that the concept of the "masses" and such other "dominative" concepts as "mass culture" and "mass communication" have done. As for the future, he appears to believe that there is no point in predicting what society will become—whether, for example, it will be socialist, according to any of the traditional definitions. But he believes that industrialism and democracy by nature create an ever more classless society in which, if things turn out as he hopes, there will be for the first time a genuine community of life, containing within it a wide diversification.

Mr. Williams' Conclusion is somewhat abstract and occasionally vague. His terminology, for better or for worse, is often quasi-religious (for example, the fundamental necessary equality is for him, so far as he states his case, not political; it is "equality of being"). But only people who habitually pretend "to know" will chide him for being abstract about so difficult a matter. As he rightly says, culture is a process and we can never fully articulate what it is while we are in it. In effect Mr. Williams ends where he began—with the idea, made newly significant, of culture as the tending of growth, and that is what it should mean for us too, however different American problems may be from English.

To make a survey of American ideas about culture, on the model of Mr. Williams' book, would be a difficult but rewarding task. It would show that except in certain intellectual backwaters, such as Southern conservatism and New England gentility, culture in the past always meant to Americans a way of life and a set of attitudes that change and develop. It would show that this is the first time in our history when virtually everyone has come to use the word "culture" as a rationalization of that which does not lead to change, as a description of the mold a people believes itself to have settled into, and as a consolatory label for a state of paralysis.

Richard Chase

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THE ARMED INTELLECTUAL

THE PROPHET UNARMED: TROTSKY 1921-9. By Isaac Deutscher. Oxford University Press. 1959. $9.50.

The Prophet Unarmed is the best thing Mr. Deutscher has yet written. It is a much better book than his overpraised Stalin biography a decade ago, and it is superior also to the earlier volume in his projected trilogy on Trotsky. This is not to say that it is faultless in matter or tone: the very first sentence of the preface, with its labored evocation of Carlyle's biography of Cromwell, strikes a jarring note. Similar traces of pompousness are not frequent; Mr. Deutscher has become more urbane, but as a stylist he still tends to solemnity. Yet this second volume establishes him as a historian of the Russian Revolution. The student in search of detail will continue to go to Mr. Carr for an exhaustive study of the intra-party conflicts of the mid-twenties, but he will henceforth have to reckon with Mr. Deutscher. For in this new work Trotsky's fall from power is at last brought into proper focus and related to the crisis of the Soviet regime after Lenin's death. Even those who do not accept Mr. Deutscher's somewhat pedantically Leninist reading of the facts can learn from him, and few will fail to find his account fascinating: if only because it reflects something of the somber drama of those days.

In 1921, with the civil war over, Trotsky was at the height of his power and prestige; in 1929 he was expelled from the USSR, never to return. What happened in the intervening eight years? The story has been told before—notably by Trotsky himself—and its outline might seem familiar by now. But Mr. Deutscher has had access to the unpublished Trotsky archives at Harvard, and his analysis does add something new. In particular he makes it clear how impossible it was for Trotsky to hold his own in the Politburo and the Central Committee, once Lenin's essential support had been withdrawn. He even suggests that Trotsky knew this, or at least was subconsciously aware of it. Certainly his tactics became increasingly suicidal as time went on, and by 1927-28—when his

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followers were being expelled from the party and shipped off to Siberia—he no longer gave the impression of aiming at anything beyond a moral victory in the distant future. Yet unlike some of the earlier oppositionists—notably those who left the party, or were driven out, after the Kronstadt rising of 1921—he obstinately clung to the notion that the regime was inherently socialist and only needed to be reformed politically. From the viewpoint of those earlier exiles who had already written the entire Bolshevik dictatorship off as the hopelessly corrupt reign of a new exploiting class, the Trotskyist newcomers of 1928 were but a dissident faction of the "Establishment"; and most of them in the end confirmed this analysis by making their peace with Stalin.

The description of this process, whereby the majority of Trotsky's followers were reluctantly brought to accept the "temporary" necessity of Stalin's personal rule, forms the most instructive part of Mr. Deutscher's final chapter. Earlier he devotes a good deal of space to the rather scholastic disputation over the supposed "Thermidorian," or counter-revolutionary menace on which Trotsky and Zinoviev fell back in 1926-7, when they had run out of more convincing and less academic arguments. It is revealing to learn that as late as July 1927, five months before his expulsion, Trotsky was able to shake the morale of the Old Bolsheviks on the Central Control Commission with a lengthy disquisition on the fall of Robespierre. A year earlier, Bukharin—then under suspicion of favoring a "Soviet Thermidor"—reacted with hysterical rage against the accusation. All the factions operated with historical analogies; and all the leading figures—with the noteworthy exception of Stalin—were genuinely in the grip of fear that they might be re-enacting some disastrous episode from the earlier drama. When the ruling group tried to discredit Trotsky in 1924 they established a precedent by muttering that he might have Bonapartist ambitions (a grotesque suggestion to which Mr. Deutscher unaccountably lends some indirect support by affecting to take it seriously, instead of dismissing it as the obvious humbug it was.); in 1927 Trotsky unnerved the Control Commission with memories of Jacobin disintegration after Robespierre's fall. But the weapon was two-edged:

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by 1928 some of the exiled Trotskyists had begun to ponder the notion that Stalin might after all incarnate the Robespierrist inheritance, in which case it was *they* who were the potential Thermidorians! This thought alarmed them to such a degree that they promptly made their peace with him! Clearly there were alternative ways of deciphering the riddle of the historical Sphinx. It speaks for Mr. Deutscher's good sense that in the end he discards these analogies—albeit a trifle reluctantly—on the grounds that Jacobinism and Bolshevism were after all separated by an entire epoch. What he does not quite explain is how Trotsky rationalized his decision to oppose a current which on his reading of the facts was irresistible.

In psychological terms, the answer doubtless is that he was both a revolutionary and a historian. In his chosen political role he had no option but to continue struggling against what, in his intellectual capacity, he regarded as destiny. This obscure rift in his personality debilitated him and sapped even his physical powers. There is evidence that he tended to fall ill at critical moments: always a bad sign. It seems plain that Stalin, by contrast, benefited not merely from his control of the machine—which he owed to Lenin—but from his lack of imagination. *He* never worried about his place in history, until he had won and could have the history-books rewritten to suit his purpose. Objectionable though this procedure doubtless is, it was of considerable help to him politically; whereas Trotsky was hampered by trying to fill two roles at once. This is not to suggest that with a different attitude he might have won, but that his failure was not simply pre-determined by "objective" circumstances: he contributed his share to the defeat of his faction, and then abused Stalin for carrying out the Opposition's program. This was natural behavior, but it disclosed an impractical streak, about which his biographer is not indeed silent, but which he does not stress sufficiently.

This reticence is in keeping with Mr. Deutscher's belief—discreetly voiced in his preface—that we are now witnessing the first dawn of a post-Stalinist age, when justice will at last be done, officially and publicly, to Trotsky's true role in the Revolution. This

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is unlikely for many reasons. The Soviet intelligentsia may indeed gradually become more curious about its past, and if it does it will certainly discover in Trotsky's writings—notably in his non-political essays composed during the mid-twenties—an interesting anticipation of some of its own demands for greater intellectual freedom. But as a political doctrine Trotskyism is as dead as Anarchism. It may linger on in places like Ceylon and the more remote parts of Latin America, but its contribution to post-Stalinist thinking in Eastern Europe is virtually nil. Trotsky stands for the myth of the October Revolution, rather than the reality of Soviet Communism, and myths, though potent in their own domain, cannot serve as guideposts to action.

In his preface Mr. Deutscher suggests that Stalin's heirs still walk in fear of Trotsky's shade "because they are afraid of coming to grips with the issues with which he, so much ahead of his time, did come to grips." It would be curious to know what he thinks those issues are. A possible glimpse is afforded by his remark that around 1921 "the proletarian dictatorship was triumphant, but the proletariat had vanished." If after all these years he still believes that the Bolshevik party rule in some sense represented, or incorporated, the "proletarian dictatorship" proclaimed (but not established) by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917, it would seem reasonable to suppose that he regards the present regime as a stage on the road to a genuinely socialist democracy in which the heritage of Trotsky's thought will at last flower, side by side with the material accomplishments of the Stalin epoch; and indeed he more or less says so. Unfortunately there is no evidence that the Soviet Union is turning into a democracy, though it is a fact that the increasingly numerous privileged stratum is beginning to elude the totalitarian straightjacket, while keeping it firmly strapped upon the "toiling masses." Even on the unlikely assumption of a radical break with the doctrine and practice of Stalinism, it is not altogether clear what benefits post-Stalinist regime is to derive from the contemplation of Trotsky's losing fight against totalitarianism.

It is odd that Mr. Deutscher, who is so conscious of the many analogies between Jacobinism and Bolshevism, cannot quite bring

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himself to draw the obvious conclusion: namely that there is very little to connect the thoughts and anticipations of those who started the revolution with the new social reality to which it gave rise. After all, the men of 1793 did not have a great deal to teach their respectably bourgeois successors. It is true that the French Left has retained a sentimental loyalty to the *grands ancêtres*. Perhaps the day will come when there is a monument to Trotsky in Moscow (there is none to Danton in Paris, save for the Rue Danton, which is not exactly one of the main thoroughfares). He certainly deserves one, although it was Lenin who made the crucial decisions in 1917-21, and Stalin who a decade later inaugurated the "revolution from above." But more than that, plus of course a notable place in the history-books? If Russia ever manages to escape from Stalinist tutelage, the result is likely to be a decided reluctance to worship at the shrine of "permanent revolution." After all, Trotsky's chief contribution to Marxist thinking was the idea that socialist revolutions are possible in backward countries. This has now been proved to the hilt, but experience has likewise shown that it takes a totalitarian dictatorship to stabilize the new society, and that this society is not classless. In the circumstances it seems a little visionary on Mr. Deutscher's part to suppose that modern socialism can go on nourishing itself from this source.

Nor is it likely that Trotsky's interpretation of what happened to the Revolution after Lenin's death will find greater acceptance as time goes on; for that interpretation was hopelessly romantic, where it was not distorted by—partly misunderstood—reminiscences of the French Revolution. Trotsky's thinking revolved around a certain conception of what had taken place in France between 1789 and 1799. This theme was something he had in common with Marx. But Marx was so far his superior in intellect and penetration that in the end he came to take a highly critical view of the Jacobin heritage, whereas Trotsky never really got over the shock of discovering that the Russian Revolution had re-enacted the French drama on a larger scale. Mr. Deutscher, who is still under the spell, faithfully reproduces the illusions of his hero and even hints that future ages will come to recognize Trotsky as the outstanding intel-

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lect of the entire historical period which has now come to an end. This is to misconceive the real significance of the Russian Revolution, and in particular to overlook the fact that it can have no "lessons" for Western countries, while the chief lesson it has for the East may well be that the era of proletarian uprisings is closed.

In a sense these criticisms are unfair. Trotsky now belongs to history, and his importance no longer depends on what we think of his own interpretation of the events in which he figured. It is easy to see from Mr. Deutscher's biography what it was that held the loyalty of his followers long after it was plain that the fight was hopeless. Prometheus on his rock is a more attractive figure than Zeus on his throne, and most people will continue to prefer the former, though they may submit to the latter. Whence the virtual certainty that Trotsky, not Stalin, will be the hero of the future literary epic to take its place beside Buechner's *Danton*. *"Was im Lied soll ewig leben, muss im Leben untergehn."*

George Lichtheim

POETRY CHRONICLE

OUT IN THE OPEN. By Katherine Hoskins. Macmillan. $1.50.
POETS OF TODAY VI. Scribner's. $3.95.
THE CROW AND THE HEART. By Hayden Carruth. Macmillan. $1.25.
IN AN IRIDESCENT TIME. By Ruth Stone. Harcourt, Brace. $3.75.
THE SELF-MADE MAN. By Reed Whittemore. Macmillan. $1.25.
SCRIMSHAW. By Winfield Townley Scott. Macmillan. $1.25.
O TO BE A DRAGON. By Marianne Moore. Viking. $2.75.

Nowadays fiction makes light of the Atlantic crossing, but the English reader of poetry isn't, in the ordinary course, likely to know American poetry written below the threshold of fame; of the nine poets represented here only Miss Moore is known to me. Consequently the observations and the premature generalisations that follow have at least the advantage of coming strictly from the

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outside; in no case except Miss Moore's do I know the proper thing to say about these poets.

First of all, the level of accomplishment is very high; in any comparable British batch there would be two or three volumes to make you ask how the devil they ever got into print. It strikes me that writing verse is something that only highly literate Americans even attempt. Instead of feeling entirely pleased about this, I complain that there are signs of over-literacy, of a sort of mandarinism, in the end of a repulsive frigidity in several of these poets. There seems, to examine one straw in the wind, to be a tiny vogue for the word "dolor," as if sorrow were essentially archaic. Or, to take for scapegoat the ambitious, skilful and unmemorable book of Katherine Hoskins, there is a habit of pursing the mouth for the production of calm, distancing ironies, but what comes out is a new and mincing poetic diction. "Some few, most temeraire, shove off/ and make for certain greeny islands . . ." is an example; a better one is the whole poem "Colloquy on a Departure," for this is about a death, and takes such care to avoid declarations of unseemly directness that it strangles itself. It seems symptomatic of uneasy relations with the vulgar that Miss Hoskins can step beyond it into solecism and non-usage: "Will she laden herself with these?" she can write, and "But light so pierced, flickered, fretted's scarcely/ Radiant." Yet her performance occasionally equals in art and fastidiousness her admired intentions; it seems strange that there should be these lapses in the treatment of the *lingua franca et jocundissima,* that the good brain should be troubled by an unspoken conviction that poetry is essentially an archaizing activity.

Finding the same pursing of the mouth in the triple volume *Poets of Today VI,* I turned with interest to Mr. John Hall Wheelock's introductory essay, which is called "superlative" and "brilliant" on the jacket. It says that syntax is necessary to poetry, a view which I mumblingly endorse, but its most revealing passages deal with what Wordsworth called simply "wise passiveness," the not frightening poems by rushing them, the deviousness of the craft by which a primary intuition is given intelligible shape. Again one agrees; intuition without intelligence is an accident: *rougir*

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d'être la Pythie! Still, nurture is of little use without nature, and it is also possible to be literate and human at the same time. Mr. Gene Baro, the first of these three poets, seems to write most happily when he is being frankly very literary, as in "What Each Thing Gives," a sort of amalgam of Yeats and Stevens, and least happily when, in Mr. Wheelock's figure, he is stalking his own shy poem. Taking a chance on his poems being in roughly chronological order, I'd say that Mr. Baro has developed remarkably; but his passion and his skill remain in a kind of ice palace, essentially literate, essentially archaic, unwillingly cold. Mr. Donald Finkel, the second of the three, is a wit-writer, praised by his editor for a victory over dissociated sensibility, and called "a poet of the aesthetics of poetry" like Valéry and Stevens. The second of these remarks makes sense, and Mr. Finkel is at his best in that kind, for example in "Archaic Figurine from Nayarit," "The Clothing's New Emperor," and especially "Poem As Seen from a Balcony." What does Juliet on the balcony see when she looks up the perspective of the street?

The figures in the distance most approach
True height when they most reach
Infinity. And so, when all
The facts are come to light, they are too small
To make a difference. Where the walls converge
The slope of her perception
Is hardly worth consideration
When, at last, substantial Montagues emerge.

Good. "In Gratitude," on the other hand, is not about poetry but about "small but adequate deaths" that try a man:

Shall I let him know of my grief
Regarding the houseflies, seeing
What hurts me was not their death
But merely their dying?

And, nicely observed as it is, this poem shows how the poet's touch grows uncertain when there are questions of life and death. His casual circumlocutions ("I am loath to remember," "all things considered," "regarding the houseflies" are the necessary febrifuges,

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but they don't achieve the required temperance of tone. Yet Mr. Finkel is clearly as good a poet as his peculiar relation to reality allows him to be. Walter Stone, third of the group, is consciously minor. In "The Brothers" he ably but in the end tediously belabors the fancy that the years of a man's age are a family of brothers; and elsewhere he draws out, with much finesse, comparable fancies. Again, he is a very literary poet, commanding a certain ironical pathos and also a certain magniloquence ("to purchase/The heaven of her, the harbor of her knees/And lie at anchor in her swinging seas" grandly resuscitates a venerable conceit). He also writes very well the Eliot or donnish quatrain:

Id haunts his darkness, Ego menaces,
Love is libidinal economy,
Birth-trauma is his Book of Genesis,
Neurotic syndromes, Deuteronomy.

It's not easy to say why so good a book should be so little enjoyable.

Now I am going to be churlish about Mr. Carruth, a very academic poet. One poem is based on Raleigh's "The Lie," another in homage to Bach is fugally constructed; there are experiments in *terza rima,* the ballad, the manner of Graves. One senses the presiding personality, but faintly, the tone is so literary. Still, Mr. Carruth's "Mondrian" is the best painter-poem in these volumes, and there are several; and in "Keraunograph," for all its "clamant" and "Illuminant," and "The Sound of the Snow," for all that its last line died before birth, there is a voice speaking out, fresh and not too impeded by its immense cultivation. There is a longish poem called "The Fat Lady" which is almost exciting. Are reviewers, as Coleridge said, palate-sered taste-dictators? Why, given such evidence of serious talent, is it so hard to care?

Mrs. Stone is too positive a poet to allow irresponsibility in reviewers, and also too attractive a writer. Still, even she is given to the prevailing tight-lipped literary bombast; this ought to be neatly ironic, but isn't it, especially in the conclusion, simply self-indulgent?

Nothing is so desirable as hunger.
I do not mean the blight of shriveled hands,

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Or the ballooned intestines of rickety children.
I mean a cheerful pain not kin to danger,
But the refinement of a nurtured leisure,
A rhythm toward intensity, the right sherry before exquisite viands.

She also goes in for bombastic inversion:

Who danced there with white bellies like full moons,
Painted and jeweled faces, distended breasts,
And scorpion-pointed nails, are merely bones . . .

Mrs. Stone has a native severity; even her very good poems have a kind of chill, like "Union," or "The Pear," an accomplished and witty sonnet. Her best poem is the long "One-Reel Tragedy," virtuoso work holding nastiness and compassion in a single thought; a poem of range and energy. Here indecent photographs of the heroine are scattered about the world:

deep
In the sea's diatoms she may sleep
Beside a sailor's beautiful picked bones,
Safe in his sea chest while the planet groans.

Now we come in out of the cold. Reed Whittemore is not asking us to remove our hats and cry master. His book is published in the new and enviable series of Macmillan Poets, as are three of the others noticed here. The presence in such a series of a civilized poet who makes only civilized demands is a sure sign of health. Sometimes these poems pretend to be no more than notes on how it feels to be sitting writing notes about sitting writing a poem. Mr. Whittemore is often beautifully relaxed, sometimes just relaxed; sometimes, as in "Waves in Peoria," he isn't relaxed at all but only pretending. Whatever he's doing he's always alive, always palpably on the other end of the pencil; he can be funny, he can be serious about poetry without asking the reader to make a big fuss on that score. I like him after all those lined faces. Today I saw on the blackboard of a philosophy classroom: Q.7. Is Q.7 a sensible question to ask? Only Mr. Whittemore of these poets could get a good relaxed poem out of that. He wrote one about a tarantula with a passion for Blake and Wordsworth.

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There was a book
By a William Tarantula once . . .
My name is William
Too.

American poets (to venture another of those generalizations) go on and get better as they age. Winfield Townley Scott's *Scrimshaw* has a time-bitten quality; it knows a lot about everything, including poetry and men; he writes splendidly about William Carlos Williams and Phelps Putnam, and he speaks out, the voice and the hands are of the same man. He has a genuine modern clarity, as in "The Hour Is Late," and he can do a lot of different things without looking affected. Without being a very big poet he is a good one; and although he's read all the poets the younger men can't forget, he is decidedly there, always, in his own right. He gives pleasure.

The power to do that is Marianne Moore's long-established claim on our duty. *O To Be A Dragon* is a thin book, twenty-two pages of verse and five of notes; four of these pages are devoted to the Brooklyn Dodgers, and that is tough on me, but they obviously come from the incredibly distinguished hand that fashioned "In the Public Garden." This work, which is of an originality, a technical bravura, a confidence (that we are all willing to study the physics of the Moore world and like it) sufficient to silence all but the most ambitious young, ends by describing itself as "Without that radiance which poets/are supposed to have—unofficial, unprofessional," and goes on:

still one need not fail
to wish poetry well
where intellect is habitual—
glad that the Muses have a home and swans—
that legend can be factual;
happy that Art, admired in general,
is always actually personal.

Of course this book is radiant, professional, personal, and full of intellect. It seems hard that one person can be a poet by brooding

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lightly on the habits of the *qiviut,* when another, taking on the whole of life and letters, simply gives off a chill. When we find warm poets, and only then, we ought to be lavish or even gross in our praises.

If you
fear that you are
reading an advertisement,
you are. If we can't be cordial
to these creatures' fleece,
I think that we deserve to freeze.

Frank Kermode

THE USES OF SOCIOLOGY

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION. By C. Wright Mills. Oxford University Press. $6.00.

Sociologists have recently been among the favorite whippingboys of literary men. This animus may be related to the fact that the domain of cultural criticism and social commentary which has been the almost exclusive preserve of the literary critic and, less frequently, the humanistically-trained historian, has of late been invaded by sociologists. Threatened with the loss of what once were claims to exclusive possession, literary men have tended to react with some violence against the intruders. Moreover, intruders, like Toynbee's external proletariat, tend to be uncouth. Sociologists, apart from a few rare exceptions, are given to a barbarous disregard for the language, an almost willful disrespect for style and elegance of presentation. Literary men have therefore found it an enjoyable sport to make fun of these invading savages, much as the British upper classes make merry over the non-U manners of the *nouveaux riches.*

The newcomers, moreover, did not invade the old settled areas unarmed. They arrived loaded with all sorts of paraphernalia the

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possession of which, or so they claimed, entitled them to preferential treatment. Research design, statistical method, quantifiable variables, data processing equipment—these were but some of the weapons menacingly brandished by the newcomers. Literary men, in defense, tended to react to this newfangled weaponry much like medieval knights reacting to the invention of cannon and muskets.

The literary men often seemed to accuse the sociologists of contradictory types of failings. They were alleged to be unaware of the ineffable differences between individuals and given to the sin of leveling individual variety under a blanket of statistical uniformities. Sociological method, it was said, could never do justice to the striving, suffering, anxious, open animal that is man. But those same sociologists were also said to be engaged in a sinister attempt to rule mankind with the help of slide rules and IBM machines. Sociologists were thus often accused, at one and the same time, of being totally ignorant of human affairs and of possessing tools so powerful that they endangered human freedom.

And, perhaps most important of all, the sociologists were so terribly industrious. While Samuel Johnson felt the trouble with literary criticism was that there was so little of it, the literary man tends to feel that the trouble with sociology is that there is so damned much of it. It's all around and cannot be ignored. Like a billboard on a highway it is ugly but commands attention. The situation is especially galling when, as in the case of a writer like Dwight Macdonald, the literary man denounces the social scientist one week, and uses his data in a somewhat parasitic manner the next week.

Such being the current relations between the social sciences and the literary mind, C. Wright Mills' recent book *The Sociological Imagination* is bound to be discussed with interest on both sides of the fence. Mills is a sociologist, but he advances from the inside a great many of the accusations against the discipline which have usually been raised by the literary outsiders. And, unlike many literary critics, Mills knows whereof he talks. He is a sociologist of considerable standing and has been exposed to the ways of the fraternity for a considerable time. Moreover, though by no means a

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stylist, he at least pays attention to style, and in this domain even unsuccessful effort must be rated above deliberate neglect.

Mills is well known as the author of widely discussed books on the contemporary American scene, among which *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* are the most noteworthy. Now he has felt the need to explain how his approach to sociology differs from that of his contemporaries in the field. His new book is thus an *apologia pro labore suo* but couched, perhaps characteristically, in terms of a vitriolic attack against most other American sociologists.

As a criticism of contemporary sociology the book is often effective. Hatred, as well as love, may be a means of knowledge, and Mills' quite pervasive dislike of the main trends in American sociology has sharpened his perceptiveness of its failings. Self-chosen exile from the main life of the discipline has enabled him to see flaws which remain hidden from those safely installed within the sociological community.

Mills draws blood when he castigates the empty busywork of much so-called empirical research and the byzantinism of pretentious theoretical schemes which are for the most part efforts to dress in complicated terminology matters of commonplace knowledge. I know of no better picture of the ways in which bureaucratically organized researchers in certain areas of sociological specialization grind out predictable data through elaborate procedures. Mills shows with a good deal of wit how, under the guise of precise measurement or high theory, the meaningless and the obvious are served up as true knowledge.

Mills is at his best when he describes the trend toward a devitalized bureaucratization of research, the tendency to subordinate the search for knowledge to the demands of public or private employers and clients. And he articulates brilliantly the misgivings about present trends in sociology that many of us have felt for some time. There is criticism here which can hardly be ignored, and which should help to stimulate the self-appraisal without which no profession can advance. In this respect Mills' commitment to dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs turns him unwittingly into a most valuable member of that very fraternity which he so violently rejects.

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At least as important as his criticism of contemporary styles of research is Mills' effort to recall to sociology its origin in social criticism and its relationships to radical political speculation. He makes an eloquent and moving plea to the social scientists to rediscover their true calling as carriers of the values of reason and freedom, and to resent the lures of narrow practicality and bureaucratic imprisonment. He wants the sociologist to be a man of knowledge confronting the men of power.

Yet when all this is said one remains with a feeling of considerable dissatisfaction. Mills contrasts American sociology today with the work of the great figures who established the discipline. He invokes Max Weber, Mannheim, Pareto, Spencer, Comte and Durkheim in order to measure against them what he considers their puny successors. He wants a revival of the classical tradition of large-scale historical analysis, of imaginative comparative study of total societies, if the sociological imagination is really to enable us "to grasp history and biography and the relation between the two within society." This is, surely, an admirable ambition. Yet one notices a curious discrepancy when comparing the work of these giants with Mills' own work. What is perhaps most striking in the work of our "forefathers" is their sustained concern with the philosophic premises of the social sciences. These were troubled men, attempting to resolve puzzling questions of method and approach. Could there be a social science similar in method to natural science, or were quite different approaches necessary? What about causality in history as compared to causality in nature? What were the respective domains of human freedom and choice in history, what was the weight of objective compulsion? What is the influence of economic as against ideational factors in the making of history? How is objectivity attainable? Though questions like these troubled the pioneers, one finds hardly a trace of such uncertainty in Mills' work. He cheerfully grinds out affirmative statements, without the slightest awe before the enormity of the task. Consider, for example, the role of values in social investigation.

Some maintain, like Max Scheler, that values transcend any society; other, with Max Weber, see values as immanent within specific societies. Mills devotes exactly one quick paragraph to this

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crucial question and ends up by stating with disarming naïveté ". . . values inherent in the traditions of social science are neither transcendent nor immanent. They are simply values proclaimed by many and within limits practiced in small circles."

While most of the great sociologists of the past tried fumblingly to find ways of asking the right questions, Mills writes as if he already knows most of the answers. But does he? I cannot help but feel that the air of certainty which emanates from this book, as it emanates from his earlier work, stems from a decided superficiality of approach. Mills always thinks on the skin of things. He is too much in a hurry, too eager to get at the "big problems" to afford the patience for the painful compilation of detailed knowledge which is one of the marks of the major scholar. When Max Weber ventured into his "big" projects he did so only after being deeply immersed for many years in the minutiae of detailed research, after agonized appraisals of method, and of the evidence as it related to his thesis. But when Mills tackles the "large issues" one cannot but feel that he does so mainly because he just does not care for the small ones, is too impatient to concern himself with them. Such a procedure must lead to the temptation to substitute catchy sloganizing for real thinking—and unfortunately Mills does not resist these temptations nearly enough.

When working with a meat axe, one may cut up reality into large serviceable chunks, but one is hardly in a position to pay attention to the marvellous intricacy of the tissue which is thus severed. And the chances are that one becomes a sophisticated simplifier instead of a major analyst. Just one example: "Popular categories of criticism," writes Mills, "high, middle, and low-brow, for example—are now at least as much sociological as esthetic." In what sense can high-brow criticism be popular? But, more important, Mills must be thinking of the 'thirties, not of the 'fifties. Recent trends in literary criticism do not fit into his general thesis—so they are conveniently neglected. Where a careful analyst would see a problem in the shift in critical method since the 'thirties, Mills is so engrossed in making his point that he misses the chance to make a fruitful *inquiry*.

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All of this would perhaps not matter very much were it not for the fact that Mills attempts to set up his own mode of procedure as a model for other sociologists, and that—what is perhaps more dangerous—he systematically denigrates all efforts to work in a different analytical vein.

A new discipline requires for its growth the utmost openness, the maximum freedom for its practitioners to strike out in the most varied directions. Some of these paths will have led to significant discoveries; others will turn out to have been blind alleys. Mills, however, attempts to impose on sociology a kind of premature closure where the fruitful is sifted from the fruitless in advance. That which is significantly related to the "big" problems of the day, "the major issues for publics and the key troubles of private individuals," is found worth pursuing; all that is not concerned with these, writes Mills, serves only to "scatter one's attention." But anyone familiar with the history of science cannot but be aware that the most pregnant discoveries, the most fruitful breakthroughs, were often achieved in seemingly remote areas, in the explanation of what appeared at first peripheral phenomena. It is often impossible to say initially whether a discovery will have a significance pointing beyond itself, and it is sheer arrogance to claim to be able to assess such matters in advance. It is because Freud immersed himself at first with "personal troubles of milieu" that he finally emerged with a system that transcended milieu. One shudders to think what a Mills writing, say, around the turn of the century would have said of Freud's parochial concerns with "troubles" in "little family circles."

Were one to transfer Mills' procedures to the field of literary criticism one would have to accuse Jane Austen of superficiality and a narrow concern with the "personal troubles of milieu" instead of focusing upon "the public issues of social structure"—didn't she know that there was a war going on? And anyhow, why didn't she write like Balzac?

One cannot help but notice in this book an astounding lack of simple generosity of spirit, a refusal to recognize results or approaches that are uncongenial to the author. This is a major reason

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why the uninformed reader is likely to gain from it a seriously distorted view of American sociology today. "In every intellectual age some one style of reflection tends to become a common denominator of cultural life," writes Mills in the beginning of his book, and he adds, the "sociological imagination is becoming, I believe, the major common denominator of our cultural life and its signal feature." One now expects that in the rest of his book the author will attempt to show how this is coming about, how the work of sociology is indeed on the way to establishing a new climate of ideas, how its approach is slowly permeating the intellectual atmosphere. But instead we learn merely that most sociologists are utterly unimaginative and that far from transforming the climate of opinion they conform to it. As a matter of fact, the force of Mills' criticism is blunted by his arrogance; it is really hard to believe that, except for C. Wright Mills and perhaps a few others, American sociology is in the hands mostly of fools and knaves.

I am quite willing to believe that Mills sincerely feels that there is a need to rebuild the sociological fraternity, but I fear that what he has in mind is a kind of fraternity for which the Germans have found the expressive phrase: "*Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein so schlag ich dir den Schaedel ein.*"

Herbert Butterfield, the eminent historian of science, once wrote that "of all forms of mental activity the most difficult to induce . . . is the art of handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another and giving them a different framework, all of which virtually means putting on a different thinking-cap for the moment." Some such effort is required by those mainly trained in the literary disciplines when they wish to arrive at some sympathetic understanding of what sociologists are trying to do. We all grow attached to our familiar thinking-caps, and are inclined to consider them the only ones that have any value. In an age of specialization the barriers to communication have become almost insurmountable, the common reader is almost extinct. And yet I should like to urge that there is a reward for those willing to make the imaginative effort to grasp the new system of relations created by sociologists. Mills

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is right in saying that there are many fools and knaves in sociology —I have heard it said that one finds them also in literary criticism —but it is absurd to deny that the sociological enterprise, especially over the last quarter of a century, has shown great promise and considerable fulfillment. The number of vulgar popularizations of sociological studies which has recently appeared is in some sense a backhanded tribute which vice pays to virtue.

Lewis Coser

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FICTION CHRONICLE

FOUR NOVELS

THE RACK. By A. E. Ellis. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.
THE OPTIMIST. By Herbert Gold. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.
MEN DIE. By H. L. Humes. Random House. $3.50.
THE CAVE. By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. $4.95.

Mr. H. L. Humes' somewhat starkly titled *Men Die* is in some ways the simplest of the works at hand, a kind of allegorical fantasy; at the same time, though, it is a technical achievement of dazzling virtuosity. Though put off at first by some of its mannerisms, I finished by being almost altogether fascinated.

The story draws its materials from one blinding instant, the explosion of a Navy munitions dump on a Caribbean island, shortly before the Great War of 1939; in this blast all personnel are destroyed except for five Negroes imprisoned pending their trial for mutiny, and the young Lieutenant Sulgrave who is responsible for them. The novelist, with an ingenuity reminiscent of that displayed in the demonstrations of topology, explores the antecedents and consequences of this instant in a series of scenes and meditations. Thus there are revealed, for example, not only the madness of the Commander, Hake, which the moment of the explosion puts in the past, but also some of the circumstances surrounding that madness, the past of that past, told to Sulgrave by the Commander's widow, Vannessa, at a time which the moment of the explosion puts in the future; past and future, by this means, come into a very elegantly patterned and classical relation with motive, prophecy, idea.

I don't think it's any part of the reviewer's business to tell over the plot in detail (since I have been unable despite all instruction to give up a simple pleasure in stories, which I hope some of my readers share), and so shall confine my comment to some generalities about the narration.

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The dramatic novel, the one which by largely implicit means seeks to relate time and idea, time and fate, which reveals the most widely separated actions as radically bound to a single center, is a crucial instance at present for any debate about the continued existence of the novelist's art. At one extreme, you have the cheesy classicism of the detective story, where purity of form is exactly equivalent to poverty of imagination; at the other, the grand peripeties and recognitions of tragedy. The conduct of this business, when it is brought into intimate relation with a certain realism of tone and detail, as in the novel it must be, is invariably risky; we seem to watch great ingenuity struggling to defeat itself, and our admiration for the superb predestinations of the design is brought into conflict with our feelings that real people do not behave in this way, that real people could not possibly be related in these hidden and devious ways, etc. A crucial instance, as I say—because it puts any assertions about form right where they ought to be, in relation to assertions about destiny. The beauty which is sought is, to my mind, the greatest beauty of all, that to be derived from a closed situation apart from the world and thus comparable to the world: the parable of composition itself as the law of nature. So it is, for instance, in *The Tempest,* which, like Mr. Humes' book, takes place on a magic island.[1]

At the same time, owing to the novelist's concern for "realism," that is, for a convincing triviality in the manners and details, the execution of this design is often attended by absurdities.

Mr. Humes' parable is essentially, I think, a grand one: the explosive island, stored (by Negroes regarded as expendable) with the powers of death, commanded by the insane and sexually impotent superego, who is in turn advised by a subordinate representative of intellect and art (helpless, kindly, cynical); the young man Sulgrave, brought in as bewildered and hurt mediator between the cold, white, punitive authority and the black, enslaved power (the Negroes and the explosives)—all this is compelling and convincing in the implacable simplicity of its relations and the inevitable, driv-

1. Cf. also William Golding's *Lord of the Flies.*

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ing motion to fulfilment of its design. I may mention especially two splendid scenes, one in which a surprise fire drill in the midst of inspection brings on disaster, and another, in which the Commander exposes to Sulgrave not only himself but an uproarious exegesis of history as a mystical and prophetic cipher. A marvelous talent is at work in these places.

About other matters I am less happy. The introduction of the woman Vannessa brings about a loss in clarity, a certain queasily erotic sentimentalizing of the story, and the making of some connections which strike me as forced.

I should mention, though, that I am *not* criticizing the style in which the woman's reflections are set forth, that is, in a series of double-column thoughts and comments on the thoughts which indeed at first resemble the poetry of a mad book-keeper. On first seeing these, I was prepared to be outraged. But since we seem to be at present in a period of automatic condemnation of anything which looks like a "device," I had better record my later impression that all this worked out quite well as a convincing imitation of the process of her distracted thoughts.

Mr. Humes has attempted something very wonderful indeed. My feelings against the accomplishment have to do with some few signs of looseness and padding, and with a certain trailing away toward the end, a weakness of resolution attending his concentration on the love affair between the widow and the young man. These faults, however—and they may be faults only, or mostly, to that strict view one takes when called upon to "criticize" something —scarcely diminish my admiring appreciation of his beautiful work.

Robert Penn Warren's *The Cave* resembles Mr. Humes' book in one essential way, that is, that people apparently unrelated, or related in apparently superficial ways, are brought into radical relation with one another by means of a single situation, in this instance that of a young man trapped in a cave. It is an incidental resemblance, perhaps, that the single situation has to do, in both books, with something underground, with ideas of mortality and mystery associated with the earth. But here the differences begin.

Mr. Warren has here, as always in his novels and his narrative

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poems, a strong, almost religious sense that he is telling a parable, not just a story in which we may find more or less meaning; this sense he betrays in a portentous anxiety lest we miss the profound import in what is going on. At the same time, though, he has an immense, almost uncontrollable gift for those details which bring to the reader the conviction that what is going on is, after all, nothing more nor less than "real life" itself: to hear him describe, as he does to begin with and thereafter again, a pair of boots ("They were number X-362 in the Monkey Ward catalogue . . ." and though I haven't looked, I bet they are), is to feel oneself at once in the real, trivial presence of everyday American life. But even before the beginning Mr. Warren's other side has got in by prefixing to the whole an epigraph from the Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic,* whence we understand that we are in the presence not only of everyday American life but also of something a good deal more serious and profound—*Myth.*

I am sorry to find myself responding in this way, for I think Mr. Warren a vastly gifted writer; a good poet, and a novelist whose only problem seemed to be the management of those great powers of the imagination which enabled him to produce *Night Rider* and (not less admirable) *All The King's Men.* But it is my response, and I am stuck with it. *The Cave* seems to me to represent his specific virtues as having reached a point of over-ripeness: his tragic concern with the search for identity becomes a kind of mass-produced mechanism, his ear for dialogue and eye for detail a glib sleight-of-hand, and his meditative lyricism an embarrassment.

It ought to be said that with all this he is still terribly good, and this remark has no idea of condescending: he is simply not as good as he has shown himself able to be. He tells an interesting story, perhaps too many interesting stories. The situation at the center—the young man in the cave—involves him, before he can arrive at it, in a number of life histories which tells in characteristic fullness (even with a very minor figure far from the action and related to it mostly by telephone, we have to hear, as a prelude to his slight involvement, a page and a half about his housing prob-

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lems, the bourbon he drinks, his acid stomach, his dead daughter, his wife's varicose veins . . .) ; consequently the drama itself sometimes gets left in rather ridiculous postures. The book opens at the mouth of the cave, it is over a hundred pages and several life stories later before we hear why one of the major persons is concerned; a girl who starts running to town with news of the disaster is left running for chapter after chapter while the sight of her produces the full-scale portraits and biographies of several persons.

There remain qualities which reveal some of the reasons for Warren's being, at the best, so convincing a novelist: for one, his sympathetic recollection of the pains of adolescence, for another, his feeling for the sorrow in people, and their terrible isolation, even, or especially, when they are ludicrous people. Of this latter trait, a quotation may serve to show both the extent of the virtue and the extent to which it has become a mannerism:

> He was so burly he always seemed on the verge of popping a seam. His thighs were so tight-packed with muscle that he wore slick places on his trousers, halfway between knee and crotch, where the bulge of muscle on one leg wouldn't clear the bulge on the other when he walked. You knew he would have a black pelt on his belly like a buffalo robe, and have a scrotum like two doorknobs stuck in a chamois bag. His hands were excessively white—as though the dishwater of the years of his apprenticeship in his chosen vocation had had permanent efficacy—and were sprigged with coarse black hairs, with square-cut nails, strong and sharp-edged like the business end of a three-quarter-inch chilled-steel wood chisel. And in that deep, dark, angry secret center of his being tears fell without ceasing.

The book in fact is full of mannerisms, though the name of them is "real life": for example, the endlessly repeated leitmotiv of Jack Harrick's holding up the head of the slain bear; the stereotype comic figure of the henpecked husband who as a result of the main action turns on his wife; such passages as the following:

> He must have been aware, for if he was aware now he was aware without looking, and the looking must have occurred some other time, and the awareness that came with the looking must have been there, somewhere, all the time. In any case, the awareness was here now . . .

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There is something overwrought, hysterical, movie-like about the whole, including the insistence on archetypal and mythical depths: not only the Cave, but the Sacrifice of Isaac; not only that, but the Redemption ("He is suffering for me. Jasper Harrick, he is in the ground suffering for me").

On arriving at Herbert Gold's *The Optimist* I am tempted to the following generality. Mr. Humes' book represents one extreme, the dramatic novel whose meaning is implicit in the action; Mr. Warren's book represents the same notion, essentially, about the novel, but qualitatively altered by the compromise with "real life" and a consequent immense expansion of detail (not to mention the quantity of meditation which goes on); while Mr. Gold's book represents the interest in real life itself, without other form than that conferred by the sequence of events, the hero's career, with no single action, and thus suggests another extreme view of what the novel may be. This generality is perhaps no better than most, and I do not mean it as an apologetic suggestion that I dislike *The Optimist* simply as the example of a type, for I believe I dislike it for itself alone; yet the differences do also strike me as typical ones, and as involving the writer of fiction in difficult decisions.

The Optimist takes sections through its hero Burr Fuller at three stages: college, the war, a decade after (married, lawyer, running for public office, unfaithful). The outer sections are in the third-person, the center one in the first. This first-person episode, a wry and funny account of the college boy soldier's life, is for the most part brilliantly recorded and entirely appropriate, in its tone, to the theme of the young man's education recollected. Retrospectively, though, the third part made it seem as if the young man's education had been recollected not dramatically, by himself, but by that far wiser person the novelist, who now took off the mask of this identity to reveal himself as entirely doubtful of his creation, whom he had set up to begin with as something of a hero however ironically regarded, or at any rate as a person of conspicuous individual interest, and who was now turning into a shapeless and helpless bore, along with the novel in which he figured.

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It may be, indeed, that this was the theme of the narrative, and that Mr. Gold's procedures, or the collapse of them, represent the artistic imitation of what was happening to Burr Fuller; but I don't quite believe it, or in it.

The first part, at college, among the fraternity brothers and the young man's two loves of comfort and despair, was pretty much a waiting game between me and the novelist. I kept grudgingly allowing that though I didn't care for it he had to start somewhere, and that my interest would properly be in what followed from all this. The second part, as I said, I enjoyed very much in itself. The third part seems a sprawling disaster, trailing off into the open uncertainties of the future, as perhaps this sort of novel has to do, and into a species of composition which suggested the author's preliminary notes about his characters, which I don't think any sort of novel has to do.

The manner of writing—this particularly applies to the last major division, amounting in length to more than half the book—belongs to that species of irony which may be called "the knowing"; there is no doubt that Burr Fuller, or Mr. Gold, or someone who is more than both and less than either, *knows* what life is in the United States, and has taken the exact measure of its worth if any, and knows especially how important it is to take a knowing tone about it:

> For a few parents it was a night out, their baby sitters safely embedded in pop, potato chips, tangerines, and the U.S. Steel Hour; the Young Marrieds would have the luxury of a real movie together instead of a spliced 1940 epic with Clark Gable eighteen inches high, not needing his belt (they saw *Band of Angels,* 1956, Clark Gable fourteen feet high, cinemascope, sash hiding the belt which tucked in the honorable summers of his age). The girls went by in their Basic Black dresses, the men wore summer suits, and some, proudly, narrow lapels and belted rumps. Burr reached back to touch his Ivy strap. *Trousers,* he thought. I am a proper young man and I shall wear the back of my trousers belted.

This wise air of sophistication and culture sometimes, in the course of preening itself, reveals the simple reverse of the poetics of

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advertising, as automobiles become "Detroit's grinning chromium colossi." So too in epigrams: "Love is a consumer product for certain marriages, like a detergent or new can opener," introducing a passage of psychological generalities of the text book type: "Consequently these women feel a driving impatience, an anger and thrill of mighty assertion . . ." Indeed, the ambition of wisdom becomes sometimes so overpowering that the author cannot resist introducing his scenes with the universal maxim which each one will exemplify: "There is one time in a man's life when he can do anything; there is one time when he can do nothing. For Burr Fuller these two times came on the same day." And so into the episode? Not quite. Into pages of reflections which, by this time, have more and more the apparent function of providing a *resumé* which will tell the author where he has got to.

Despite some demonstration of narrative skill, this book is upon the whole dull and pretentious, overweighted with its commentary on itself, and exasperatingly smug in an attitude of moral rightness which the author is unable or unwilling to state unequivocally or bring into any relation with his story.

I may introduce here a brief scholium on sex in the novel at present. Mr. Warren and Mr. Gold, and to a much lesser degree Mr. Humes, exhibit their characters as preoccupied in the most explicit way with the sexual equipment of men and women, especially women.

Let us note, first, that they are perfectly free to do this. And let us note, second, that I do not dispute their right to do it. And, third, that I do not deny that human beings, and perhaps especially male human beings, are very often thus preoccupied.

All these disclaimers because any hint that one might even accidentally sympathize with the Postmaster General in any way on these matters will bring up quite naturally—dear God, naturally!—the suspicion of one's being either impotent or in some more complicated way queer. Accepting this risk, there is another element I should like to consider.

It is that all these thoughts of lust, feelings-up, and copulations take place not in real life but in an ideal realm, the realm of

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the novel, which is as far removed from everyday human life as would be something taking place under the sea. Their vividness, or the quantity of detail in which they are described, may provoke but never satisfy our desire (leaving to one side masturbation, which is a remedy neither more nor less outside the realm of fiction than a man's being moved by a novel to go in to his wife). Since our technologists have not yet enabled us to feel every hair on that bearskin rug, the criterion of sensuous vividness is brought into question, and with it is brought into question also the part played by detail of all sorts, not only sexual, in fiction. As to sexuality in particular, it is the monstrosity not only in love, but in writing about love, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit. The writer's freedom to indulge himself in these descriptions—which have, most often, a remarkable similarity one to another—may or may not be good for him. But my impression is that it is not altogether good for the art he practices, that the increase in the quantity of sexual detail is but a special case of the proliferation of detail throughout (flawing Mr. Warren's book, destroying Mr. Gold's); and that the development of a separate art form of nipple-description, or tit-wit, while it will probably not be the death either of sex or the novel, is not necessarily in itself the demonstration of great artistic powers, and may even become a great bore.

Nothing I have said should be taken as intending the least the least infringement on the artist's right to do just as he damn pleases.

The Rack, by A. E. Ellis (I have been told this is a pseudonym) portrays the long sufferings of a young student, Paul Davenant, in a French tuberculosis sanatorium called Les Alpes. It is a very grim book, having often the air of being not so much a fiction, and also a very funny one. In this unfamiliar area, the massive support of medical detail (not of sexual detail, though there is a love affair) seems entirely relevant and functional; and in fact, though massive, this detail is not quantitatively so much; it is only exact.

Through Paul Davenant's sufferings, which owe as much to

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the treatment as to the illness, or more, through his reflections and feelings, his conversations, even through the varying condition of his finances, which make a difference to his accommodations (first a charity patient, he becomes a private patient on a small legacy, which eaten through he goes back on charity), we are made the witnesses not only of illness itself, and not only of the demeanor of society toward this illness, but also of an appalling, final, and heroic self-revelation.

Beyond this, a certain allegorical intent becomes visible now and then. The illness and its treatment are a religious experience, the hospital and its equipment are seen as in catacomb or cathedral. At the same time, historical and sociological considerations are brought to bear on the nature of the illness, which is for many patients, on the one hand, a result of the War (malnutrition, ill-treatment in concentration camps), but on the other hand, especially for Paul Davenant it seems, a disease ironically obsolete, like himself a characteristic phenomenon of Romanticism, of Nineteenth Century Europe. Within the remorseless literalism of the account things of this sort are for the most part allowed to be implicit; but one of the doctors remarks to Paul, on finding Proust, Stendhal, Dostoievsky among his books, "You're a century behind, *cher monsieur*. You see yourself in front of a *décor* of samovars and racing droshkys or dining by candlelight *chez la Princesse de Noailles*, whereas in reality you're just another of Chekov's dreary, eternal students."

I've not got much to say about this extraordinary book. On the jacket, in addition to numerous ecstatic but brief encomia from England, there is quoted a substantial part of a review by V. S. Pritchett, and though it is a pleasure to agree for once that all the shouting is about something, my agreement leaves me without any impulse to expand these remarks. A very gloomy and a very courageous book. Though its technique is novelistic, sometimes amateurishly and sometimes brilliantly so, its readers will understand me if I say that it comes as a great relief after all those novels.

Howard Nemerov

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MARTEREAU. By Nathalie Sarraute, Translated by Maria Jolas. George Braziller. $3.50.

This is a unique book, and as always when dealing with the unique one is uncertain just how much attention it deserves. The unique resists definition, but where one cannot define, one can surround. Oddly, perhaps, the uniqueness of *Martereau* can be surrounded most effectively by clichés: "breaking new ground," "opening new territory," "the novel turning in upon itself"—these apply, as do others; the question remains, however, whether the breaking, opening, and turning achieve very much. One suspects that they do and, to employ another cliché, that Mme. Sarraute has achieved a minor triumph. What keeps the novel minor is an oppressive over-elaboration of form. One feels that very large guns are being trained on very small game, and no matter how impressed by the concentration of the prose, one is invariably conscious of the reverberation.

The action of the novel, of which there is very little, is narrated by an orphaned young demi-invalid living with an aunt and uncle in Paris. Though he has pretensions to interior design, his real profession is that of dissector. Under his knife comes virtually every sentence spoken in his hearing by the members of his ménage and by the mysterious family acquaintance, Martereau.

> I had to catch them all on the wing without allowing anything to pass, all their words, their slightest intonation, and examine them slowly as one would a dangerous contrivance.

Much of the novel does precisely this, and we are treated to a mammoth spectacle of dissection. It is this spectacle which appears quite often to be an over-elaboration of form, unsupported by content.

Whether or not the perceived parallels to dangerous contrivances are legitimate is the central mystery of the novel, obscuring even the ostensible mystery of Martereau who, as an associate of

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the narrator's uncle in a shady business deal, may or may not have intended to make off with a large sum of money. The narrator is hypersensitive, doubtless a hypochondriac, and possibly paranoid. One questions—for they are fairly shocking—whether his laboratory findings (implicit rather than explicit) are to be trusted other than as guides to his own peculiarity. One would like to know, that is, whether Mme. Sarraute actually holds that all intimacy is essentially warfare, that there is no personal reality beyond the effort to keep one's own ships afloat while sinking those of the enemy, and that all of this is there as awareness in the mind of everyone. If she does not hold this—and one cannot tell—the alternative seems to be that she is merely presenting a portrait of one warped but articulate product of a soft, top-heavy culture.

What is involved here is doubtless a deliberate ambiguity, not only an ambiguity of meaning, but of narrative authority. In an uncertain age in which the form of the novel has sought to reflect the character of that age, *Martereau* provides a new twist. Here one simply doesn't know whether or not to trust the authority of the narrator, to give literal acceptance to a single word of the novel. It is a keen joke and a disconcerting puzzle, thus a minor triumph. Where it stands as literature is another and rather difficult question. Despite the somewhat distracting over-elaboration of form, and despite the absence of clues to the novel's actual subject, the writing—rendered very decently into English by Maria Jolas—is sufficiently effective to make one dubious of even the most modern prescription for the form of the novel.

David Fitelson

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Partisan Review announces the granting of 1959 Longview Literary Awards for the following:

JAMES BALDWIN, *"Letter from the South"*—Winter 1959
ROBERT LOWELL, *Four Poems*—Winter 1959
JAMES PURDY, "Everything under the Sun"—Summer 1959
MARY McCARTHY, *Writings on the Theater*

To stimulate American literature, awards of $300 each are made annually for outstanding work in poetry, fiction and essays appearing in publications which cannot pay for contributions or which pay inadequately.

The aim of the awards is to bring up the compensation for good writing to the professional level regardless of where it is published—and thus to aid in relieving authors of the pressure to relax their standards or submit to extra-literary requirements in order to be paid for their work.

The field of "little" magazines and collections is surveyed by a panel of well-known writers, and award winners are chosen on the basis of the merit of their contributions.

The panel selecting the award winners consisted of Saul Bellow, Louise Bogan, Charles Boni, Alfred Kazin, Thomas B. Hess, and Henri Peyre.

Partisan Review contributions receiving Literary Awards for 1958 were

"Victorian Morals and the Modern Novel" by John Henry Raleigh—Spring 1958

"Report from the Academy" by Walter Stone—Summer 1958

"All Men Are" by Leo Litwak—Summer 1958

* * *

A feature of Longview's Literary Awards Program, as of its Arts Purchase Program, is that no applications are received and that there are no forms to fill out. *Unpublished manuscripts are not considered, but all literary periodicals are surveyed.*

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